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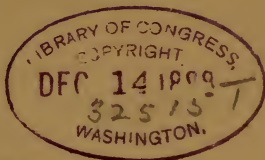
JESUS BROUGHT BACK

Meditations on The Problem of Problems

BY

JOSEPH HENRY CROOKER

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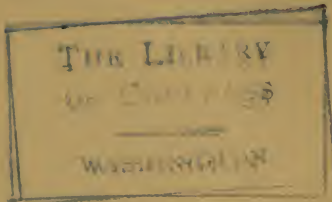
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TO

The University Channing Club,

MADISON, WISCONSIN.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
I. THE MESSIANIC HOPE	15
II. HOW THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN .	57
III. JESUS OF NAZARETH	99
IV. THE GLAD TIDINGS	141
V. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO-DAY . .	177

INTRODUCTION.

THIS little book upon the sublimest character in history is written neither to instruct the specialist nor to amuse the curious. Its aim is to give intelligent and earnest inquirers, who have no time for extended research, some of the most important results of recent scholarship upon this topic and other related subjects, together with certain observations bearing upon the religious life, suggested by these discoveries. While it has been prepared for the purpose of helping on that intellectual reconstruction of religion which is fast sweeping aside so many notions long held respecting the origin and nature of Christianity, yet the chief object has been to set forth an interpretation of the character and teaching of Jesus which will make him more attractive, and his gospel more powerful in human lives.

It is a misfortune to have the man Jesus hidden out of sight behind the dogmas of speculative theology, not only because they

remove him from that strictly natural and human fellowship which ought to unite us to him, while they cut us off from the most rational and inspiring appreciation of his character, but because they interpose a strange mechanical scheme of redemption between our soul and the Father, whom Jesus strove to make his countrymen feel as an immediate Presence and an Infinite Love. And as destructive criticism lays these dogmas in ruins, as it is fast doing, it is by no means certain that a true appreciation of Jesus or an adequate consciousness of Sonship will spontaneously supplant the old faith. The outgrowth of a false doctrine is not always the inrooting of a true doctrine. Indeed, in many cases, we know that when men come to realize the unhistorical and irrational character of the Christ of theology, by which Jesus has been invested and obscured, they lose all interest in him and cease to avail themselves of the inspirations of his gospel; and because what they once accepted as religion turns out to be fiction, they conclude that there is no sheltering Fatherhood presiding over the destinies of their lives.

But however strangely the mediæval scholastic may have misrepresented Jesus, and

however unwisely the iconoclast may scoff at this sacred name so rich in religious associations, yet we cannot afford to ignore Jesus of Nazareth. And an age which asks justice for Muhammed and pays loving tribute to Buddha cannot with reason be indifferent to Jesus. The man who leaves untasted the waters from this fountain neglects one of his greatest helps to the Divine Life; and the man who turns a cynical spirit toward this Prophet of Galilee simply condemns his better self and ignores his own possibility.

In this age of religious and theological transition, when old forms of belief are disappearing and old ideals of conduct are losing their power, it is worth while to cultivate just as rational an appreciation of Jesus as possible; and also to put forward that interpretation of his life and message which is least open to destructive criticism and is most serviceable for training in righteousness. As the Christ of theology loses its hold upon heart and mind, the need becomes greater for a portraiture of Jesus which shall not offend the rational tendencies which are by pre-eminence the divine tendencies of the time; while the social unrest of these days makes it necessary that we abandon all side-issues and

trivial discussions that we may concentrate our emphasis upon the central truths and primary duties of human life, which are nowhere better described than in his imperishable gospel. And it is hoped that the following brief and outline treatment of this great theme may be of some service in this direction.

Doubtless from a literary point of view the large use of quotations in some of these chapters will seem a decided blemish. And yet, the motive which has prompted their use has not been either to display a wide knowledge of the subject or to save the effort of independent composition. The object of this book being as much to show the results and tendencies of modern scholarship as to discuss the problems involved in its title, it has been felt that this could in no better way be done than by placing before the reader the very words of eminent authors, which in many cases would carry more weight and be of more interest than any other statement of the same facts. So that, while not wishing to make a mere compilation, the aim has been to let the great leaders of opinion speak somewhat for themselves.

The references to authorities placed at the beginning of each chapter are given simply

to aid such readers as may wish to gain a more thorough knowledge respecting these subjects. No attempt has been made to give extended lists of books for the use of specialists, but the purpose has rather been to select such works as will afford a reasonably full and satisfactory knowledge of each topic. Only works in the English language have been set down, though many are translations from foreign tongues which give the results of the latest investigations. It seemed needless to go into the exhaustive literature of the subject for students acquainted with French and German. Where several works on the same topic are given, the aim has been to refer to those that correct and supplement each other, both as regards the matter contained and the spirit of the writers. And while some conservative works are included in these lists, yet many from that side, in certain respects valuable, have been omitted because so vitiated by the bias of traditional theology.

It was the original plan to print with these five other lectures: Jesus as the Messiah of the Apostles, Paul's Gospel of the Cross, Jesus as the Logos, Jesus as the Second Person in the Godhead, and Jesus as Redeemer.

But it has been decided to leave these more historical and doctrinal discussions for a second series to be called, "The Christ Idea in Theology." In this future volume, starting from the belief of Jesus' disciples in his resurrection, an attempt will be made to trace the evolution of those speculative doctrines which have clustered about Jesus, and which have occupied so large a place in the thought of Christendom. And while the statement will in each case be necessarily brief, yet it will doubtless be sufficient; for generally a description of the main facts respecting their origin and growth is a sufficient refutation. Many topics closely related to these pages will there be discussed,—a fact which will explain to the reader that surprising silence and apparent want of completeness suggested by a casual glance at these chapters. And as in this, so in the next volume, the earnest effort will be to present a plain and brief statement of such facts and suggestions as will help toward clearer thought and truer life.

J. H. C.

MADISON, WIS., August, 1888.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE.

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 - (1) Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. xlviii.-li.
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 - (3) *Christian Examiner*, vol. lxxxvii. p. 71.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE.

THE rabbis in the time of Jesus used, in their study of the Hebrew Scriptures, a method of interpretation by which they put into the text whatever they wished, without any particular regard to the meaning of the original. The following passage, taken from that treatise of the Talmud of Jerusalem called Berakhoth, illustrates their allegorical method, and reminds us of that style of Biblical interpretation which we all doubtless heard from preachers in our youth: "It is said (Solomon's Song vi. 2), 'My beloved is gone down into his garden to the beds of spices, to feed (his flocks) in the gardens, and to gather lilies.' How is it that after speaking of one garden it afterwards mentions several? This is the interpretation of the verse: *My beloved*, means the Almighty; *is gone down into his garden*, that is to say, the Universe; *to the beds of spices*, meaning Israel; *to feed (his flocks) in the gardens*, this means the other nations of the earth; *and to gather*

lilies, these words represent the holy people that the Almighty calls away to place them with his chosen people.”¹ Nothing could be more irrational and fruitless than such explanations, and yet this is a fair example of the way the language of the Old Testament was twisted this way and that, just as fancy might suggest or ingenuity lead.

Now this allegorical method of interpretation passed from the rabbis over into the Church; and the early Christian writers indulged in explanations of Scripture equally fanciful and irrational. It was an uncritical age, and nothing like a true science of Biblical interpretation existed; and the point where imagination ran wild was the topic of Messianic prophecy. Those early Christians felt constrained to connect the person and ministry of Jesus just as largely as possible with the predictions of the Hebrew prophets. And this allegorical method enabled them to find definite allusions to Jesus in the obscurest texts of those writings. They read into the words before them just what the exigencies of the situation demanded. They found Messianic predictions of Jesus everywhere, — in passages of dryest historical statement, and

¹ Ch. ii. § 8.

in passages of the most enigmatical character. And this example taken from the Talmud, no more absurd than hundreds of passages found in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers of the second century, shows us how easily all this was done. It was a work of pure fiction.

And the extensive Messianic character of the Hebrew Scriptures having been established by this allegorical method of interpretation, the conviction that Jesus was definitely foretold in a great many passages of that literature descended through the following ages, and was shared by those English scholars of two and a half centuries ago who made King James's version. They believed that Hebrew prophecy was full of allusions to the minutest incidents of Jesus' life; and naturally their belief in the Messianic character of the Old Testament would show through the version which they made, especially in all possible Messianic passages; for every such translation, whether of Faust or of Job, is colored by this personal element.

Thus these translators, believing that the chief object of the Old Testament was to predict Jesus, gave its texts a Messianic coloring wherever fancy could suggest such a render-

ing; and yet this coloring is found upon examination to be in a majority of cases a false coloring. The passage in Job xix. 25, 26, is a notable example of the mistranslations caused by this bias. The true rendering is: —

“Yet I know that my Vindicator liveth,
And will hereafter stand up on the earth;
And though with my skin this body be wasted away,
Yet without my flesh shall I see God.”¹

The meaning of the passage is simply this: that though he wastes away to a mere skeleton, yet before Job dies some one will free his character from the false charges brought against him by his enemies. Now the translators, always intent on finding Messianic meanings, interpreted into the text their own notion and made it read like a prediction of the Messiah and a declaration of belief in a bodily resurrection: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” But, as every scholar now holds, this is an incorrect translation; and neither in this text nor anywhere

¹ Noyes's Job, p. 64.

in the book of Job is there any allusion to a Messianic hope, or to a belief in a bodily resurrection. All that Oehler, a conservative scholar, can claim for Job is this: "In it are deposited the presuppositions of the hope of eternal life."¹ And Dr. Briggs, one of the most eminent Presbyterian scholars in America, makes no reference to Job in his discussion of Messianic passages.²

Another case in point is Genesis xlix. 10. The passage reads in our version: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet until Shiloh come;" and "Shiloh" has been understood to be only another name for "Messiah." So that it was claimed that in these words Jacob, nearly two thousand years before our era, definitely foretold the coming of Jesus. But the text was not so understood until the sixteenth century, when this notion arose from an absurd blunder on the part of Münster.³ Dr. Briggs calls this a perfectly untenable opinion, and he translates the passage thus: —

¹ Old Testament Theology, p. 564.

² Messianic Prophecy.

³ This passage has reference, says Oehler, to "the rest into which Judah shall enter after victorious conflict."
— Old Testament Theology, p. 522.

“ The sceptre will not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's rod from between his feet,
Until that which belongs to him come,
And he have the obedience of the peoples.”¹

This is, then, in reality, no prediction at all, being nothing more than a reminiscence of an ancient popular conviction that they, the Israelites, would some day possess Canaan in peace.² Thus the translators, under the guidance of their theological bias, put a Messianic reference into every text which could be so rendered; so that there is much more in our common version about the Messianic hope than in the original.

Again, the chapter headings make a modern theological commentary, which in many instances completely misrepresents the teaching of the Old Testament. They have done more than anything else to obscure the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures and to fill the common mind with erroneous ideas of many of its passages. The translators found, as they imagined, certain notions in the body of the chapter, and they indicated by these chapter headings that such notions are con-

¹ Messianic Prophecy, p. 94.

² See also Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, ch. iv.

tained in that chapter. They were therefore put there as guides to lead the reader to interpret the Bible just as the translators did; and as the uncritical person reads, he understands the text in the light of these chapter headings. He naturally reads into the chapter what they indicate; but in so doing he radically misunderstands the Old Testament. In nine cases out of ten there are no Messianic allusions where the chapter headings assert such. So that these modern additions or chapter headings, which are no part of the original, lead the reader far astray.

For example: at the head of the second chapter of Isaiah, we read, "Isaiah prophesieth the coming of Christ's kingdom." Below we find that passage which ends thus: —

"He shall be a judge of the nations,
And an umpire of many kingdoms;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks."

When we look at the connection in which this passage stands, we see that the writer had reference to the time in which he lived; and that the person described, "He shall be a judge of the nations," is no far-off, mysteriously born God-man, but Israel's God, Jeho-

vah himself. The prophet is simply describing what will happen when all the people shall obey the Law of God; and he thought that time near at hand. There is no warrant whatever for the chapter heading; and the application of this passage to Jesus is a mistake. This is distinctly admitted by Dr. Briggs, who remarks upon this passage, "It is vain to seek for any physical fulfilment of the prediction."¹

These Messianic chapter headings are especially numerous in the Psalms, and are there used with as little reason. Psalm xciii. has this title: "The majesty, power, and holiness of Christ's kingdom." But that psalm is a simple song of praise to Jehovah, without the slightest allusion to a Messiah; while it is absolutely destitute of the faintest reference to a future Saviour.

It is the opinion of most great scholars, following De Wette, that none of the Psalms are Messianic. There are in them many expressions of fervid hope; some of them give utterance to a sublime confidence in the future of Israel; but it is only a very fanciful and unscientific interpretation which finds in them any description of a personal Messiah whose advent is adjourned by the writer to a far-off

¹ Messianic Prophecy, p. 183.

future. Even Oehler claims only four as Messianic, and these merely in a general way.¹ The Psalms, then, are not predictions, but either popular songs adapted to the service of the Second Temple, or compositions especially designed for that service; and the claim that they are Messianic rests upon pure fiction.²

The fact is that when we read a copy of the revised Old Testament, without chapter headings and marginal references, we are surprised at finding so little mention of a Messiah; and when we read that collection of writings, not for dogma, but as literature, we are surprised at the numerous and explicit contradictions of traditional theology therein contained; while we are agreeably surprised at the new truth and beauty which we find where all was meaningless when studied as a supernatural revelation.

Again, this whole subject is confused by the present arrangement of the Old Testament

¹ Old Testament Theology, p. 524.

² The strongest plea for the Messianic character of the Psalms has been made by Alexander, *Witness of the Psalms to Christ*.

If one will compare this work with Noyes's Translation of the Psalms, or with Kuenen's "The Prophets," pp. 479—497, he will see upon what shadows the traditional interpretation depends.

books, which obscures their historic relations by putting Leviticus, written in the fifth century B.C., before Deuteronomy, written in the seventh; and Daniel, belonging to the second century B.C., before Amos, belonging to the eighth. It is therefore impossible to trace the historical evolution of the Messianic hope with any satisfaction as long as we follow the present arrangement, which presents a mass of writings thrown together without any regard to their age.

Modern scholarship has reached certain general conclusions respecting the date of various portions of the Old Testament, which must be taken into account in this discussion. They may be briefly stated thus: —

1. The oldest collection of Hebrew literature proper which we possess comprises the writings of the prophets from Amos to Ezekiel, covering the period 800 B. C. to 580 B. C.

2. The Pentateuch — not the work of Moses — which reached its final shape about 444 B. C., having been built up from many separate works and fragments: the Book of Covenants, Exodus xxi. 1–xxiii. 19, about 900 B. C.; Deuteronomy, about 621 B. C.; the Levitical legislation in Numbers and Leviticus about

500 B. C., while the narrative portions range in age from 800 B. C. to 500 B. C.

3. The Writings, works like Job, as early as 600 B. C.; histories, like Kings and Samuel, about 550 B. C.; prophecies, like Jonah and Malachi, about 400 B. C.; and Psalms scattered from 600 B. C. to 200 B. C.

These results in the main are practically established. What Kuenen, whose judgment is equal, if not superior to that of any other living authority, writes respecting the present position of scholars with reference to the Pentateuch, holds good in respect to these conclusions in general: "Some eminent scholars still hold out against the 'Graffian hypothesis,'¹ but it is no longer possible to count its supporters or to enumerate *seriatim* the works written in its defence or built upon its assumptions. In setting forth in this treatise, for the first time, its complete and systematic critical justification I am no longer advocating a heresy, but am expounding the received view of European critical scholarship."²

If we now bear in mind this general order we shall be kept from much confusion in our study of this subject. For instance, if we

¹ Essentially the view just stated.

² The Hexateuch, p. xxxix.

find in the stories of the patriarchs given in Genesis a Messianic allusion, we will not attribute it to the time of Abraham, but regard it simply as the reflection of a popular sentiment which existed in the fifth or sixth century B. C., when this tradition became fixed in literature. If we find, as some think, the Messianic hope in one of the Psalms, we will not look upon it as the belief of David, but as the belief of Judaism which was founded by Ezra late in the fifth century B. C., and of which the Psalms are poetical expressions. Again, when we read the glowing Messianic ideal in Daniel, we must not carry that back to the Captivity, but bring it down four centuries later, to about the year 164 B. C., during the time of the Maccabees.

These facts, it is evident, compel a radical modification of the old notions respecting the Messianic hope. It was once a common saying that the Messiah was definitely predicted as early as the time of Abraham, and that every chapter at least of the Old Testament contains some allusion to Jesus. The truth, however, is that the oldest portions of that literature which contain any such hope, are not earlier than the eighth century B. C.; and the passages which contain unmistakable

Messianic meanings, that is, descriptions of a personal Messiah, are comparatively few. Modern scholarship, therefore, finds but little about a personal Messiah in the Old Testament, and that little belongs to a comparatively late date.

There are many passages in the Old Testament which are Messianic, if by Messianic we simply mean a fervid hope of future glory; but there is no reason whatever for applying the term Messianic to these general expressions of hope. On the other hand, of definite descriptions of an anointed king, or Messiah, by whom under Jehovah prosperity will be brought to Israel, there are at most not more than a dozen passages.¹

The origin of this Messianic hope has been made a needlessly difficult problem by projecting a late and exalted moral ideal into the far-off past, and considering it as appearing instantaneously among crude conditions to which it could have had no relation. And from this point of view it has been argued that the supernatural must be brought in to

¹ In an exhaustive review of Drummond's "Jewish Messiah," a very able writer made this statement: "It—the Messianic hope—was never an essential part of the national, or Hebrew, creed."—*The Athenæum*, 1878, p. 118.

account for its appearance. But in this way we create a fictitious difficulty, which, when removed, leaves no necessity for the supernatural. If we look upon this hope at its beginning as the simple, natural thing that it was; if we cease to carry back into the eighth century B. C. what belongs to the second; if we attend strictly to facts rather than to tradition,—we shall experience no great difficulty in explaining what we find, and we shall have no reason to call in the supernatural.

A reference to Israel's history for two centuries before the rise of this hope will help us to clearer thought. After many ages of tribal jealousies and incessant warfare with the old occupants of the land, the Hebrews achieved national unity under David. The energies of the people thus stimulated and organized created the glories of Solomon's reign. But such sudden prosperity is dangerous, and after Solomon came strife and rebellion; to which was added successive invasions that brought disorders, immoralities, and superstitions, until Israel seemed on the brink of ruin. Then occurred what has so often occurred among other peoples,—the noble remnant, the faithful and unconquered few, rose up to denounce their disloyal brethren

and to feed the fires of patriotism.¹ Inspired by the memory of their former glory and moved by the surrounding desolation, they went to work to repair the fallen fortunes of their nation. A very natural thing to do; a movement which has had its parallel among almost all peoples. The only unusual feature here was the peculiar character which this movement assumed.

This effort at national regeneration marks the rise of Hebrew prophecy in the eighth century B. C., which began with Amos and culminated in Isaiah.

These Hebrew prophets were thus essentially earnest patriots who yearned and labored for a happy and united fatherland; and their peculiarity consisted in the moral and religious quality of their patriotism. Their doctrine may be summed up in three short sentences: Jehovah is Infinite Holiness and only demands righteousness of man; Israel is especially Jehovah's people; and Israel shall be glorified when its people turn from their sins. Thus they interpreted God in terms of moral law, and they insisted that only obedience to moral law could glorify the nation. Their watchword was, Happi-

¹ Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, p. 179.

ness belongeth unto holiness.¹ Thus their faith, on its religious side, was an intensely ethical monotheism.

These prophets were not chiefly or largely predictors of far-off future events. Fortune-telling and soothsaying were the business of the old religious order which preceded them; but this new prophetic movement, beginning with Amos, was a radical departure from that superstitious practice; and it aimed primarily at popular instruction in righteousness.

It is a significant fact that this position is that taken by such historians as Duncker, who, in describing the Prophets of Israel, uses this language: "They are no longer soothsayers and seers; they do not predict any more; they do not announce definite facts; they only know what will and must be the consequences of the sinful life of the people; they proclaim a great judgment; they declare what must be done to turn aside the wrath of Jehovah."²

These new prophets differed most radically from the old school by paying little attention

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, ch. i., ii.

² *History of Antiquity*, vol. iii. ch. ii. See also Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, ch. x.

to prediction and by giving their energies to moral teaching.

Even the predictions upon which these prophets ventured were warnings rather than foretellings; they were simply the readings or interpretations of moral conditions: Obey the moral law and you shall prosper; follow heathen gods and ruin will come. And very many of their predictions of this character were never fulfilled. Notable examples of the non-fulfilment of such prophecies are, Isaiah's prediction respecting Damascus (ch. xvii.); Jeremiah's prediction respecting the conquest of Egypt (ch. xliii.); and Ezekiel's prediction against Tyre (ch. xxvi.-xxvii.).¹

Theirs, then, was the hope of a good time coming, interpreted as a reign of righteousness; their own king would rule in Jerusalem; the land would be full of plenty; and all the peoples of the earth would be at peace. They did not, however, apply to this hope or to that time the term Messianic. That deliverance of Israel would be brought about, not by a Messiah, but by Jehovah himself. The anointed king, when mentioned, was not pictured as the agent, but as a part

¹ For a full discussion of the subject, see Kuenen, *The Prophets*, ch. v.

of the fulfilment of that hope. They spoke of that time as the day of Jehovah, — the reign of righteousness. Bleek, a conservative scholar, states the case thus: "In most of the predictions this [salvation] is ascribed to Jehovah himself, the Divine Defender of Israel, without distinct prominence being given to any human deliverer."¹ This hope was therefore something very natural, — an intensely ethical patriotism.

And yet it assumed various forms in the writings of these different prophets. Amos, 780 B. C., prophesied an ideal blessedness, but made no mention of a king or Messiah. The work is to be done directly by Jehovah:² —

"Behold the days come, saith Jehovah,
That the plower shall draw near to the reaper,
And the treader of grapes to the sower of the seed ;
And the mountains shall drop new wine,
And all the hills shall melt.
I will bring back the captives of my people Israel,
And they shall build the desolate cities, and shall inhabit them ;
And they shall plant vineyards, and drink their wine ;
They shall also make gardens, and eat their fruit."³

¹ Introduction to the Old Testament, § 191.

² Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, p. 186.

³ Amos ix. 13, 14.

Hosea, 750 B. C., agrees with Amos in simply describing an ideal blessedness, with no reference to a king. The work is Jehovah's alone: —

“I will be as the dew to Israel;
He shall blossom as the lily . . .
And his beauty shall be as the olive-tree,
And his fragrance as Lebanon.”¹

Micah, 720 B. C., adds to this picture, as a part of Jehovah's gift, a “ruler in Israel,” and also describes his particular work: “Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and treadeth in our borders.” (Ch. v. 6.)

Isaiah, 710 B.C., also introduces the idea of a king, but as a part of the fulfilment rather than as the agent of that “day of Jehovah.” Yet, unlike Micah's, Isaiah's king is to be a king of peace, who is thus described: —

“For to us a child is born,
To us a son is given,
And the government shall be upon his shoulder,
And he shall be called
Wonderful, counsellor, mighty potentate,
Everlasting father, prince of peace;
His dominion shall be great,
And peace without end shall rest upon
The throne of David and his kingdom,

¹ Hosea xiv. 5, 6.

To fix and establish it
Through justice and equity,
Henceforth and forever.

The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will do this."¹

Now, as Robertson Smith remarks, "Isaiah's ideal is only the perfect performance of the ordinary duties of monarchy."² Isaiah makes no reference to a God-Man who will redeem mankind by mystical sacrifice. Indeed, Isaiah makes comparatively little mention of this king; and in his later prophecies ceases altogether to speak of him.

A century later Jeremiah, 600 B. C., musing upon the calamities of his people, uttered this hope:—

"Behold, the days are coming, saith Jehovah,
When I will raise up from David a righteous Branch,
And a king shall reign and prosper,
And shall maintain justice and equity in the land."³

Jeremiah evidently lays more stress upon the work and Davidic descent of this king than any of the other prophets, but, as in Isaiah's portraiture, his work is the "ordinary duties of monarchy;" and in a subsequent

¹ Isaiah ix. 6, 7.

² The Prophets of Israel, p. 306. See also Noyes, Prophets, vol. i. p. xxxi; and Wellhausen, History of Israel, p. 416.

³ Jeremiah xxiii. 5.

passage (ch. xxxiii. 17) he goes on to explain that he did not have reference so much to a single king as to a perpetual succession of kings.

From this brief review of Hebrew prophecy from 800 B. C. to 600 B. C. we are led to several very important conclusions: —

1. The chief element of their hope was their expectation of the complete restoration of the Israelitish nationality, — a Hebrew patriotism lighted up by faith in Jehovah and directed toward righteousness.

2. Theirs was more the hope of a glorious time than of a particular king. When the king enters it is as a part of that glorious time, and his duties are purely human.

3. They looked for that restoration in the immediate future. The character of their hope is well described by Schürer: "The older Messianic hope virtually moves within the boundary of the then present circumstances of the world, and is nothing else than the hope of a better future for the *nation*." ¹

4. Their most explicit predictions were again and again doomed to disappointment. The vanquisher of the Assyrian pictured by Micah never appeared; the Prince of Peace

¹ The Jewish People, vol. ii. p. 129.

whom Isaiah predicted never ruled in Jerusalem;¹ the endless succession of Davidic kings prophesied by Jeremiah finds a melancholy commentary in the mournful history of the Jews.

5. They never used the word "Messiah" in that special sense which we are accustomed to associate with it, but simply as an ordinary title of the human king whom Jehovah had or would set over Israel. The word with the article, "The Messiah," is not an old Testament phrase at all; and they never described Israel's exaltation as a Messianic time. In the words of one of the greatest of Biblical scholars: "It is asserted that 'anointed' (mashîach, messiah) was the universally received appellation of the approaching king of David's family; but this assertion is untrue: no one trace of any such use of this word can be pointed out anywhere in the Old Testament."²

6. Their hope of a glorious future was unique only as Greek genius was unique; and we no more need supernatural agency to explain the one than the other.

¹ Unless we apply his language to Hezekiah, in which case it is historical rather than predictive.

² Kuenen, *The Prophets*, p. 271.

To find the next exhibition of any such hope we must come a century this side of Jeremiah and plant ourselves among the colonists at Babylon, which was a "forcing nursery rather than a prison cell" to the exiles. There we find a great spiritual genius, the Latter-Isaiah, or the Evangelical Prophet, whose writings are preserved in the last thirty-seven chapters of the book called Isaiah. The dual character of this book and the exilic origin of the latter half—first taught as long ago as Aben Ezra—is now universally accepted as one of the great triumphs of modern criticism. The language of Bleek expresses the opinion of critics: "These prophecies do not belong to Isaiah or his age."¹ The author portrays a beautiful and sublime hope; but he neither makes mention of a prince of the house of David, nor of a personal deliverer. "Times were altogether changed, and David's line had sunk too low for him to cherish any hopes of its restoration."² Instead, he pictures his people under the form of a servant, who by patience, long-suffering, fidelity, and loyalty glorify God and win the nations to the service of Jehovah:—

¹ Introduction to the Old Testament, § 198.

² Knappert, Religion of Israel, p. 151.

“Behold my servant whom I uphold,
My chosen, in whom my soul delighteth ;
I have put my spirit upon him ;
He shall cause law to go forth to the nations.
He shall not cry aloud, nor lift up his voice,
Nor cause it to be heard in the street.
The bruised reed shall he not break,
And the glimmering flax shall he not quench ;
He shall send forth law according to truth.
He shall not fail, nor become weary,
Until he shall have established justice in the earth,
And distant nations shall wait for his law.”¹

That this “servant” is an idealization of the Hebrew people rather than a personal Messiah, a position long held by advanced scholars, is now admitted by such men as Dr. Briggs, whose judgment is thus expressed: “The prophet presents by personification the ideal Israel, the pious nucleus of the nations as the Messianic agent.”² This being the case, the prophecy can in no sense be a prediction of Jesus. This servant is represented as suffering; but these sufferings are not represented as a propitiation or as an expiatory satisfaction, but simply as an inevitable part of that lot which falls to every ser-

¹ Isaiah, xlii. 1-4.

² Messianic Prophecy, p. 346. See also Bleek, Introduction to the Old Testament, § 205.

vant of God; and they are redemptive only in the sense that a mother's self-sacrifice is redemptive.¹

Now, after the Later-Isaiah, came three centuries of silence during which this Messianic hope was very faint indeed. The descendants of the exiles returned to Judea; and Ezra organized them into a church about 444 B. C. They were now at work building the fabric of Judaism, which was an ecclesiastical order rather than a political state. Their hope had taken a new direction; and it was as students of the Law that they now expected to redeem the world. The words of Ewald are: "In reality the hope of a Messiah in the stricter sense often grew very faint during these centuries; and in the mere wisdom of this time the more general hope of Israel even had often no longer practically any place, as the Book of Ecclesiastes shows."²

Only once more did this peculiar form of patriotism rise to a fervid hope before our era. Under the hateful and hated rule of Antiochus the Jewish heart was wrought upon until

¹ See article in "Unitarian Review," vol. x. p. 580, for an admirable but brief description of Scholten's views on this subject.

² History of Israel, vol. vi. p. 107.

a national enthusiasm rushed forth like a mighty torrent and uttered its hope in the visions of Daniel, about 164 B. C.¹ Assuming the name of an ancient hero, and transporting himself to the distant past, the writer put his burning thoughts into a series of symbols which pointed to his own day as the consummation of history and the exaltation of Israel. This writing was a patriotic address made directly to his countrymen to inspire them with heroism and a boundless hope in their trying circumstances. The author describes their deliverance as coming from Jehovah himself; and he symbolizes this consummation as the descent of "a," not "the," "son of man." Scholars are now practically agreed that this phrase, "son of man" does not refer to a personal Messiah, but to the people Israel; so that there is nothing in Daniel which describes a future Redeemer, or that can be applied to Jesus of Nazareth. Even Oehler admits that this view "cannot be decidedly

¹ A strong and conservative argument for the late date of Daniel is given by Bleek, Introduction to the Old Testament, §§ 254-269. See also Stanley, History of the Jewish Church, vol. iii. p. 77. Schürer, one of the ablest German scholars, in treating of Daniel, does not even argue the question, but takes the later date for granted. The Jewish People, vol. iii. p. 49 *et seq.*

refuted.”¹ The Apocalypse of Daniel is, therefore, simply a highly poetical picture of certain great historical cataclysms about to occur, as the writer thought, in which Jehovah himself would be the sole actor and out of which Israel would emerge in triumph to shine as the brightness of the firmament.

We come now to the Messianic ideal as held during the century before Jesus. And here we must make a distinction between the Messianic hope, the hope of great glory for Israel in a general way, and the Messiah-hope, the expectation of a Davidic king who would restore the political independence and power of Israel.² The one was the ideal of a kingdom of heaven considered as a reign of righteousness; the other the expectation of a temporal king who would re-establish the national glory. In the century under discussion, among the more enlightened Jews, dwelling abroad and living in Palestine, it was this *Messianic hope* which was cherished. A ministry of enlightenment

¹ Old Testament Theology, p. 529. See also Schürer, The Jewish People, vol. ii. p. 137.

² This distinction is made by Kuenen, Religion of Israel, vol. iii. p. 260.

through the moral exaltation of Israel, rather than a regal dynasty, was thus the ideal and hope of educated Jews at the birth of Christianity.

The culture of Judaism about the time of Jesus found expression in two remarkable men, — Hillel and Philo, one the glory of Jerusalem, and the other the ornament of Alexandria. Hillel was the greatest of the Pharisees, a man memorable for the gentleness of his spirit and the purity of his life. And it is a significant fact that while Hillel cherished large hopes for his people, neither he nor his followers expected a personal Messiah. A learned rabbi of our own time and country writes: "The expectation of a coming Messiah was not a doctrine of the Hillelites."¹ Philo, who became the interpreter of Greek philosophy to his people, also spiritualized this Messianic hope and seems never to have mentioned a personal Messiah² He shared in the ideal hopes of his race; but he did not connect the fulfilment of those hopes with any supreme personage. There were even rabbis who denounced as a

¹ Isaac Wise, *History of the Hebrews'* Second Commonwealth, p. 265.

² Bigg, *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 25.

superstition this expectation of a coming Messiah.¹ These facts warrant the conclusion that the expectation of a coming Messiah was not a doctrine commonly taught in the centres of Jewish learning in the age preceding Jesus.

But among the common people, especially in times of calamity and oppression, we find a different state of affairs. They cherished the *Messiah-hope*, — a strong and vivid expectation of a personal deliverer. The miseries of the time pressed more heavily upon them; and uneducated people generally have exaggerated notions of what can be accomplished by a single person in the way of redress and reform. The popular idea of a Messiah, or son of David, varied a great deal, and was, generally speaking, very indefinite and misty; but it was a very real and powerful expectation among certain classes. It was not a clear and reasoned conviction, but a pervasive and deep-seated political fanaticism, ready to burst into flame under exciting and provoking conditions. It was fed by the study of three writings, Daniel, the Sibylline Oracles, the Book of Enoch;² works produced in the second

¹ Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, p. 272.

² For a full discussion of this pre-Christian apocalyptic

century B. C., and all of that marvellous symbolic character calculated to fire the popular imagination. The masses caught up all the phrases in these works, like the "son of man" in Daniel, and used them as literal descriptions of the coming Messiah. This popular, political *Messiah-hope* often gave rise to outbreaks against the government, and found a champion in the party known as the Zealots. But it is a great mistake to consider this the universal or even the common Messianic ideal; or to assert that all the Jews at this time looked for a coming Messiah, or held a low and sensual view of the Messianic time.

The Messianic belief of educated Jews, then, was the ideal of a diviner society, something like the dream of French rationalists respecting universal progress; but there was also a popular and political hope which pointed to a personal Messiah, — a hope something like that which smouldered so long in down-trodden Poland. And both forms of this expectation were powerful and important factors in the rise and progress of Christianity.

A few words must be devoted to the rank

literature, see Schürer, "The Jewish People;" or Drummond, "The Jewish Messiah."

and work of this expected Messiah. Writers like the Later-Isaiah, the author of Daniel, Hillel, Philo, and others, who held the Messianic hope, who cherished an expectation of the moral exaltation and ministry of Israel as a holy people, and who thought of the nation itself as the Messianic One, the Servant of Jehovah, or Son of Man, — they, of course, looked to God alone as the sole author of that coming glory and gladness. And this was the most prominent thought, not only of the ancient prophets, but of the educated classes in Jesus' time. And having no doctrine of a personal Messiah, they knew nothing of his rank or work.

But those who expected a personal Messiah believed in his exalted humanity and nothing more. In the words of Ewald, they believed that he would be the highest model of a perfected human life.¹ The idea of a God-man, such as is described in the creeds, is absolutely foreign to the Jewish mind, and is nowhere found in the Hebrew prophecies. Where our version makes Isaiah call the expected king, "mighty God," even Dr. Briggs admits that it ought to read, "divine hero."² The term

¹ History of Israel, vol. vi. p. 110.

² Messianic Prophecy, p. 200.

Immanuel, "with us is God," is used by Isaiah as the name of a child about to be born; never as the name of the expected king; and it was never understood by the Jews to have a Messianic import.¹ When Jeremiah named the expected son of David, who would be, according to his expectation, their victorious and glorious king, "Jehovah is our righteousness," he simply used a method which every Israelite practised in naming his children. It was a common orientalism, which meant no divine rank or supernatural mission.

There are three English scholars who, more than any others, are entitled to speak upon this question; and we will venture the appearance of being pedantic by quoting their conclusions.

Davidson's words are, "It is impossible to discover a distinct vestige of the belief among the Jews that he (the Messiah) was God or truly divine."²

Drummond, after a careful study of all the Apocryphal and related literature, declares, "We have no certain traces of a supernatural or pre-existent Messiah."³

¹ Smith, "Prophets of Israel," p. 272.

² Theological Review, July, 1870.

³ The Jewish Messiah, p. 292.

And Westcott, a conservative scholar, in writing of the Jewish idea of a Messiah up to the time of Jesus, makes this statement: "The essentially divine nature of the Messiah was not acknowledged."¹

The testimony of Oehler is similar: "Not even in the oldest Targums can the doctrine of the superhuman dignity of the Messiah be found."²

Perhaps the most decisive evidence, however, is the statement which Justin Martyr, writing about A. D. 150, attributes to Trypho, his antagonist: "For when you say that this Christ existed as a divinity before the ages, then that he submitted to be born and become man, yet that he is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish. . . . For we all expect that Messiah will be a man [born] of men."³ Here both pre-existence and miraculous birth are represented as non-Jewish views of the Messiah. It is significant that Edersheim, after searching through the Talmud with a mind bent on finding some

¹ Introduction to the Study of the Gospels: Jewish Doctrine of Messiah, ch. ii.

² Herzog, article "Messiah." See also Schürer, *The Jewish People*, vol. ii. p. 159 *et seq.*

³ Dialogue with Trypho, ch. xlviii.-xlix.

evidence of the kind, is compelled to own that no such idea as that of the divinity of the Messiah can be found in that collection.¹

Thus the proof is absolute that the Jews who did believe in a personal Messiah never ascribed to him divine attributes or a super-human nature. Moreover, these same people, in their conception of the work or mission of the Messiah, never went beyond the belief in the glorification of Israel as a people and the conversion of the Gentiles to their Law. There was much that was carnal in their hope, and yet there was much more that was noble and spiritual. Their expectation was, not that the Messiah would abolish the Law, — the doctrine of Paul which made him so hateful to his countrymen, — but that he would exalt it and make it universal.

It is a significant fact, seldom noted, that all the allusions to suffering occur in connection with the *Messianic hope*, — that expectation which did not imply a personal agent, but which looked toward an ideal society. The people Israel, as a Messianic servant, is pictured as suffering, but never the personal Messiah, the expected king. The image of

¹ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus*, vol. i. pp. 171, 179.

the personal Messiah was always that of a glorious and victorious king, with whom it would be impossible to connect the idea of suffering. So pain and dishonor are never associated with the anticipations of a personal Deliverer. Deutsch remarks: "All the places where suffering and misery appear to be the lot forecast to the Anointed, it is Israel to whom the passage is referred by the Targums."¹ This fact made it difficult for Christians in early times to convince Jews that the lowly and suffering Jesus was the Messiah. In all that was written by the early Church Fathers in controversy with the Jews, it is plain that Christians felt this difficulty keenly, and the forced analogies and whimsical arguments to which they resorted show how little they could find in Hebrew Scripture and Jewish thought to support the notion of a suffering Messiah, which was the character they felt obliged to give Jesus.

And not only is the ideal of the personal Messiah absolutely free, in both Old Testament and Rabbinic literature, from all associations of suffering, the personal Messiah is never pictured as engaged in any priestly office; he is never represented as an expia-

¹ Literary Remains, p. 373.

tion of his people's sins; his ministry is never called a propitiation or satisfaction of Divine justice. This Oehler strangely denies, claiming that the prophets picture the Messiah as a sufferer who atones for his people's sins. But he is unable to produce a single definite text in support of his assertion, as any one who consults his pages will see.¹

But the writers of the New Testament did apply these Messianic allusions respecting suffering to Jesus of Nazareth; yet in every case, when we turn to the original, we find that the Old Testament passage refers to Israel as a people rather than to a personal Messiah; so that the Christian writers misapplied all such texts. Indeed, in quoting the Old Testament, they followed the false method current among the rabbis in their day, — a method which put into the text whatever the writer wanted to find there. Therefore the allusions of the prophets to the sufferings of Israel as the people of God, the servant of Jehovah, contained in those Messianic ideals without a personal leader, — these the New Testament writers applied to Jesus without a particle of reason. And upon their manner of interpretation Toy remarks, their

¹ Old Testament Theology, p. 532.

"method of interpretation cannot be called legitimate."¹

And in this connection it is interesting to note that, when carefully examined, not one of the Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament as a direct prediction of Jesus, is correctly used, or can bear the interpretation thus put upon it. A few of these cases may well be briefly examined: In Matthew ii. 15, the author quotes Hosea xi. 1, "Out of Egypt I called my son," as the prediction of an incident in Jesus' life; but when we turn to the original we find no reference to the future, but rather to a past event in the nation's life. The application of the quotation is absolutely unwarranted. The writer of the Fourth Gospel quotes from Psalm xxii. the following: "They divide my garments among them and on my clothing do they cast lots," as a definite prediction of what the soldiers did with Jesus' garments at the crucifixion. Yet the Psalmist here made no reference to the future, but spoke simply of what was then happening to himself. When carefully examined all the passages of the Old Testament referred to Jesus as Messianic predictions by the New Testament writers are found

¹ Quotations in the New Testament, p. xxvii.

to have been similarly misapplied. The general conclusion which we reach, then, is this: that it is impossible to find in the Old Testament any true description or definite prediction of the Personal Agent who appears in the New, — a conclusion which may seem startling; which indeed is contrary to the claims and necessities of Orthodox theology; but which nevertheless is indorsed by eminent Biblical scholars generally.¹

Now it is evident that no one person could be the fulfilment of all those Messianic ideals. The warlike king, of Micah; the peaceful prince, of Isaiah; the righteous branch, of Jeremiah; the son of man from heaven, of Daniel; the just king, of Zechariah; and the wrathful prince, of Ezekiel, — these could not all be combined in one individual. No historical person could be all that Hebrew prophets had predicted respecting the Messiah, because the predictions are contradictory. But although Jesus was not such a Messiah as the prophets described, or as the Jews expected, yet this general Messianic expectation did much to shape his ministry and clothe his person with authority. Every

¹ "The New Testament Christ is another than the Messiah of the Old Testament." — Kuenen, *Prophets*, p. 510.

great character must work in connection with some great sentiment. Every great leader must somehow enter into and possess the popular imagination. This hope had popularized a circle of expressive phrases; it had created an expectant enthusiasm ready to act when called upon; it had prepared the common mind in readiness for the planting of great doctrines; it had fashioned an ideal which waited for fulfilment; it had produced an atmosphere favorable to certain great spiritual changes. A great reservoir full of hope, enthusiasm, and religious sentiment was at the service of any one who could wisely use it. Thus Jesus found mighty spiritual forces at hand prepared for action; a zeal ready to act when called upon; an atmosphere suggestive of greatness; a throne waiting for an occupant; a glowing sentiment prepared to serve. This Messianic ideal supplied Jesus with a substantial platform and with indispensable agencies; and without these auxiliaries his person would have received less attention and his words would have produced less impression than they did, — a fact forcibly stated by Baur: "Had not the Messianic idea, the idea in which Jewish national hopes had their profoundest expression, fixed itself

on the person of Jesus, and caused him to be regarded as the Messiah who had come for the redemption of his people, and in whom the promise to the fathers was fulfilled, the belief in him could never have had a power of such far-reaching influence in history. It was in the Messianic idea that the spiritual contents of Christianity were clothed on with the concrete form in which it could enter on the path of historical development."¹

It was 'Jesus' task to give this ideal a new and nobler interpretation, and to direct these agencies toward larger and humaner ends. He had to work with certain Messianic materials, without which doubtless he could have done but little; and yet he built these materials into a doctrine of his own and made them the instruments of a new spirit. Jesus saw that the sword could accomplish nothing; he, therefore, treading in the footsteps of the nobler spirits of his race, gave the old hope a moral and spiritual interpretation which was the only fulfilment possible. He stood for all that was highest in that hope and added to it his own personality.

¹ Church History, vol. i. p. 38.

HOW THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN.

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HOW THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN.

THE Bible of the primitive Church was not the New Testament, but the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul in his missionary journeys carried no written Gospels. When Peter preached at Antioch he did not read from the Sermon on the Mount, for it was not then written. The original church at Jerusalem, during its forty years' existence until the fall of that city, never possessed a copy of the Gospels such as we know. Even the followers of the Apostles themselves, who built up the churches in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Philippi, — such men as Apollos and Timothy, — used no written accounts of Jesus' life. The new faith was spread through Asia Minor, along the African coast, through Greece, and even to Rome, before any memorial of Jesus had been written. As late as the year 100, very few churches possessed any such book as our Gospels; and the work of the Christian missionary and the creation of new churches went on without any refer-

ence to such written documents. In those years, and long afterwards, people depended upon tradition, oral reports, what had been handed down by word of mouth, for their knowledge of Jesus and his teaching.

While the immediate disciples of Jesus, those who had been with and heard him, were living, the need of written accounts would not be felt. People rather hear some companion tell the wondrous story of Jesus than read it. And as his disciples expected his reappearance hourly, they saw no necessity for writing anything about him. Men like Peter, who looked daily for the coming of Jesus and the end of the world, could of course have no interest in writing out a memoir of their master to serve future ages; for what need of a memoir when Jesus himself would be there. Thus all of Jesus' immediate disciples went down to their graves without attempting any extended account of their beloved Messiah; and so far as we know, only one, Matthew, even wrote any record of Jesus' life or teaching; and what he composed was a brief collection of Jesus' sayings, similar to what we know as the Sermon on the Mount.

The first Christian presentation, or preach-

ing, of Christ did not aim to give an account of Jesus' life or teaching, but to prove his Messiahship, his fulfilment of prophecy as then understood; thus the source of that preaching was not written Gospels, but personal knowledge. And the chief apostles, as they went about, spoke what they remembered of Jesus' words and works; and especially those things which identified him with the Messianic hope. The people whom they instructed repeated this message to their converts; and so on, until an oral tradition was formed, — that is, a body of well-known accounts of what Jesus had said and done. But this tradition, or common fund of information, came in time to assume somewhat different shape in different parts of the Church. For the immediate disciples of Jesus and their converts were scattered abroad; so that each to some extent gave the gospel to a special locality. And as the memories of each respecting Jesus naturally and inevitably differed from those of all the others, because they were not all equally impressed with the same occurrence, therefore it came about that the gospel as told by any one person contained parables and wonders which were absent from the accounts given by his co-

workers. As this gospel, or the oral tradition, would be retold in his neighborhood as he gave it, and as the same thing would occur in other places where the other disciples labored, it came about also that the gospel-tradition, as known in various localities, consisted of different series of incidents and teachings, and also of different versions of the same incidents and teachings; for no two men ever give exactly the same account of the same event.

The state of affairs was somewhat like this: As the church in Damascus and the church in Antioch had received the gospel from different disciples, each possessed the gospel-tradition in a distinct form. The Antioch tradition, we may suppose, contained the parable of the leaven, which was unknown at Damascus; while it did not contain the parable of the talents, which was known at Damascus. Moreover, at Antioch they taught that Jesus drove the devils out of two men into the swine, while at Damascus they mentioned only one man. These differences arose very naturally. Each disciple told the things that he remembered best; and as the human memory is fallible, these accounts of the same event necessarily varied. Thus it happened

that the gospel-tradition current in one region contained certain teachings and certain reports of incidents different from those that constituted the gospel-tradition in other regions.

And it must be remembered that for a long time these reports about Jesus existed as oral traditions, not as written accounts. They had been given to the churches by the disciples, not in the form of documents, but in the form of sermons.

Let us turn, for instance, to the reports of Peter's sermons contained in the second and third chapters of Acts. Now let us follow, in imagination, one of his converted hearers to Damascus or Cæsarea, and listen to what he says to his neighbors at home. We should hear him repeating the substance of Peter's sermon, but with numerous, if unimportant variations. Thus the gospel story would change in spreading; the essential thought would remain the same, but the coloring and details would vary.

As the years went by, these gospel-traditions, the accounts of Jesus which passed orally from one to another, were subject to two processes: —

1. They were more and more shaped for

purposes of edification or religious instruction. The popular interest in the gospel-traditions was not critical but moral, not historical but religious. People were more anxious to use them to create faith and higher life than to preserve them as absolutely accurate histories of Jesus. This tendency worked mightily "to transform simple narrative into the symbol and channel of higher religious and moral truth."¹ For why preserve such a history, since Jesus was about to re-appear and dwell with them forever? Thus, without any purpose to deceive, the chief motive in using the gospel-traditions was so to present the story as to make converts.

There was also a strong tendency among the early Christians to exalt Jesus, to present him as the perfect fulfilment of the Hebrew prophecies, in order to give his words power over the imagination and the conscience. Their first and chief object was to use the gospel-traditions to make men believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Doubtless we seldom sufficiently realize, in reading the Gospels, that the purpose which created them was polemic rather than biographical. The crystallizing

¹ Holtzmann, Protestant Commentary, vol. i. p. 37.

motive which accumulated and shaped the record was Messianic. Materials were selected which would create belief in Jesus as the Holy One foretold by the Prophets. The Gospels, then, are not so much the portrait of a life as the plea for a faith; not so much descriptions of a character as expositions of a conviction. The ever-present motive guiding the writer was the desire to show that Jesus is Messiah; to link him with prophecy. Prof. Holtzmann remarks, "A purely and exclusively historical interest does not exist in early Christianity."¹ The author of Luke's Gospel expressly states that he writes to confirm faith. His words are, "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things which thou wast taught by word of mouth."²

To carry out this purpose Christian teachers felt free to arrange, reshape, and embellish the current reports. And in using the materials in this manner, parables were taken out of their place and made to illustrate Jesus' second coming, while many stories, like that of Jesus' temptation, were poetized until the original facts were obscured beyond recovery. But all this was done, not to falsify a written

¹ Protestant Commentary, vol. i. p. 38.

² Luke i. 4.

record, for no such written record then existed, but to make their message more effectual. Thus the original gospel-traditions or reports were slowly and successively embellished for purposes of instruction and edification. And evidences of this fact exist in our Gospels where we have both the prosaic and the poetical account of the same incident or teaching.

2. Each gospel-tradition in the course of time was more and more enriched by materials borrowed from the others. Intercourse between localities brought to the people of one region a knowledge of parables and incidents not contained in their own tradition; and these new materials were added to the stock of common information respecting Jesus. In this way the gospel-tradition of any one district, while maintaining its original character to a certain degree, grew richer by accretions borrowed from the traditions current in other regions. And as the critical spirit was entirely absent; as, also, this new material was prized not so much for its historical accuracy as for its homiletical value, its power to produce faith, it was added without being scrutinized and without being compared carefully with the tradition there current.

Little attention, therefore, was paid to the contradictions which thus crept in; for people cared more about the general power of the tradition to create religious feeling and interest than about verbal accuracy.

This, then, was the condition of affairs at the fall of Jerusalem, about forty years after Jesus' crucifixion, when nearly all, if not all, of the immediate disciples of Jesus had died. But those disciples had taken the first important step; they had originated different gospel-traditions, which, as yet circulating orally, were subject to modification; and were being enlarged by adding to each the material found in the others. And here, it must be remembered that these gospel-traditions were only very brief and inadequate reports of Jesus, whose moral power was better illustrated and more effectually conveyed by the new life of the reporters than by such traditions. The creative influence was communicated from one to another as a personal force rather than by a didactic lesson. And the power of the church was not in its writings, but in its new manhood and its new type of social union. While people then wished the gospel-tradition to represent Jesus correctly, yet they used great freedom

in dealing with it, and were more anxious that it be serviceable for instruction than accurate in detail.

Somewhere about the time of the fall of Jerusalem, A. D. 70, men began to commit these gospel-traditions to writing. And in this work they were influenced by causes which existed generally; and prominent among them were these: —

1. As the expectation of Jesus' second coming became less intense, his followers began to prepare to make Christianity a permanent religion for the earth as it was; and for that purpose they felt the need of written records of his life.

2. When the men who had known Jesus personally were nearly all dead, and when people could no longer hear the gospel from the lips of his immediate disciples, the demand was naturally made for something more definite and substantial than wavering, uncertain oral tradition.

3. As heresies sprang up and as the habit of exaggeration developed, the more earnest and sober-minded sought some means by which to combat erroneous beliefs and to restrain lawless fancy. Such means they found in a written Gospel.

The pressure of these conditions led men in various localities to write out what up to that time had existed as an oral gospel-tradition. But "they were simply records made just as personal needs, and opportunity to supply them called them forth; and they circulated, possibly, scarcely beyond the threshold of their author."¹ The names of two such writings, not to mention others, are known to us: (*a*) The Gospel of the Hebrews, which recorded the tradition as known in Palestine, and with which the name of Matthew was associated; a work which existed as late as the fourth century. (*b*) The Gospel of Peter, thought by some to have been almost the same as the former. This writing had considerable prominence in the second century, and doubtless recorded the gospel-tradition as known in Asia Minor. And a careful study of the Christian literature of the year 125 gives us many indications that other such Gospels were then in existence, whose very names have been lost, even if they ever bore any name at all, except that general name, "Gospel of Jesus Christ." And these writings form what we may well call the first group or layer of gospel records or documents.

¹ Reuss, *History of the New Testament*, vol. i. § 174.

This first attempt at the composition of a Gospel was simply the opening of a record-book in which some man wrote out the gospel-tradition as he knew it; and then left the book open for others to transcribe into it new material. "And when something new or more accurate was learned, it could without difficulty be introduced into a work which consisted essentially only of a greater or less number of detached passages, whose connection could neither be injured nor benefited by such interpolations or additions."¹

In this way fragments of Jesus' discourses were put together until the Sermon on the Mount was formed. And as the gospel-traditions had been enriched by intercourse between different localities, so these written Gospels were enriched by copying out new material from one into another. Now it is doubtful whether any of these first gospel records—with the possible exception of Matthew's Sayings of the Lord, mentioned by Papias—were begun even by an immediate disciple of Jesus; while it is evident that none was vouched for by any leading apostle or metropolitan church; while all the evi-

¹ Reuss, *History of the New Testament*, vol. i. p. 172.

dence goes to show that when these primitive Gospels had already been in existence for some years, they had no official authority whatever.

It must be kept in mind that these first attempts to record the gospel-tradition were very brief in comparison with our four Gospels, and that oral tradition continued for many years to be used by their side as the chief and fuller source of Christian information and instruction. One of the very earliest witnesses, Papias, who wrote about the middle of the second century, expressly states, "For I do not think that I derived so much benefit from books as from the living voice of those that are still surviving."¹ And by "books," he doubtless had reference to these primitive gospel records. And as the primitive Gospels were brought into comparison, and their defects made manifest, it would naturally occur to men, after a time, that out of them a complete gospel history ought to be composed. In this way our present Gospels came into existence; and they are all based upon these earlier documents and represent the second group or

¹ Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Crusé's Translation, book iii. ch. xxxix.

layer of gospel writings. And not only did the editors of our present Gospels use documents previously written, but the later editor—such as the author of Luke—used the work of the earlier editor—such as the Gospel according to Matthew. The process by which these second and completer Gospels grew up, and the character of the literary work thus produced have been well described by Dr. Samuel Davidson. He says: “The canonical Gospels were composed out of written materials chiefly. Earlier documents, which afterwards disappeared, preceded and contributed to each. This applies not only to the first, but to the second and third. But oral tradition must not be excluded; though it formed a small element in the composition of each, because much of it had been incorporated into written collections when the canonical Gospels appeared. . . . The evangelists used one another freely, having ulterior sources, written and oral, which they employed according to the purpose that guided selection. It was not their intention to sift the documents at their disposal, to copy them literally, or to adhere to them slavishly. Their scope was wider, following no exact rule; and their passing from one

source to another should not be judged by a modern standard.”¹

Thus these Gospels which we possess are not reports of what Jesus said and did, written at the time on the spot. In their present shape they are not even the testimony of eye-witnesses; they are rather collections which men, near the beginning of the second century, edited from then existing writings and traditions. The heading which each bears, such as “The Gospel according to Matthew,” simply means that the original oral source of the tradition thus written out was traced back to that apostle.

The evidence that our present Gospels were so composed, and thus form the second group of gospel writings, is as follows: —

1. There was a group of primitive Gos-

¹ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. pp. 353, 355.

The language of Meyer, a leading German authority and inclined to the conservative side, is in the same line: “*The view according to which one evangelist made use of the other* — where, however, the *gospel-tradition*, as it existed in a living form long before it was recorded in writing (Luke i. 2), as well as old *written documents* composed before our Gospels (Luke, *l. c.*), come also essentially into consideration — is the only one which is fitted to enable us to conceive of the synoptic relationship in a natural manner, and in agreement with the history.” — Commentary on Matthew, p. 23.

pels, such as the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of Peter, and others, which were widely known long before any trace of our four Gospels can be found. Though now lost, we have quotations from them which show that they gave the gospel story not only in a different form but in a more primitive form than that contained in our present Gospels. All of which proves that ours were produced in a later age.

2. The fact that our present Gospels, even as late as the year 150, had no official authority proves that they were not early compositions sent forth by the great apostles themselves. The conclusion of Dr. Samuel Davidson, after a careful study of all the primitive church writings, is thus expressed: "Before A. D. 160 there is no proof that Christians generally had great reverence for the first three Gospels, or for the productions by which they were preceded and by whose aid they were written."¹ If known to be the attested work of those apostles, they alone would have been depended upon for a knowledge of Jesus. But the fact that they only slowly gained circulation in the Church, and that during the second century a greater

¹ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. p. 363.

value was found in oral tradition than in them, is decisive. We cannot reconcile the habit which church teachers then had of testing these written Gospels by oral tradition, with the theory that our Gospels were early put in circulation by the apostles themselves. If so, tradition would have been tested by them. Their unauthoritative character at that date proves conclusively their late and un-apostolic origin. All these facts go to establish the conclusion that our present four Gospels belong to a second group of gospel writings, — a truth to which the writer of Luke bears testimony by his express statement in the opening words of his Gospel, that “many before him” had made a declaration of the gospel story.

3. This theory of the origin of our present Gospels is the only one which satisfactorily explains their peculiarities of construction and their relation to one another. A passing glance at the first three Gospels shows that they are mosaics made up of many fragments which were put together without order or general plan. In many places, as in Luke viii., sayings without any connection and unrelated events are joined together. In other places the order of events is inverted, — as,

in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is put too early in Jesus' ministry. Again, the beginning and end of a narrative are separated by an interpolated incident, as in Mark vi.; while the outlines are often unaccountably vague, — especially respecting names and the relation of events, — as in the accounts of the Resurrection and Ascension, showing how far the report had travelled by oral tradition before being written out. Now it is hardly possible that a companion of Jesus would have written out such a disconnected and ill-arranged narrative. And it is especially in view of these characteristics, as illustrated in the case of Matthew, that Meyer is led to draw the conclusion, "In the form in which the Gospel now exists, it cannot have originally proceeded from the hands of the Apostle Matthew."¹ But if our Gospels had the origin here described; if for many years such gospel-traditions circulated orally and were successively enriched; if they were then written out, and afterwards served as the materials out of which our Gospels were edited, then all is clear.

Moreover, this theory of their origin explains the relation of the Gospels to each

¹ Commentary on Matthew, p. 2.

other. Any comparison of our first three Gospels proves that they are so much alike that they could not have had absolutely independent origins; while their differences are such that they could not have been copied the one from the other. Now these facts are all accounted for if we suppose our Gospels edited from a mass of primitive gospel records. For in this case, at certain places each editor would copy from a different document, while at others all would copy from the same document; which would produce that curious relation of likeness and unlikeness which exists among those Gospels.

4. But the chief evidence for this theory, and the complete proof of the late origin of our present Gospels, is the fact that they were never definitely quoted until after the year 150. We have something like a dozen Christian writings which belong to the first half of the second century, or very near to that period of years; and in them all the sayings of Jesus and numerous incidents of his life are mentioned, but it is evident that the writers did not draw their information from our Gospels. Those early writers never in a single case give direct quotations from

our Gospels; nor do we find their names anywhere in all the pages of that literature.

Papias, in writing near the middle of the second century, mentions certain writings of Matthew and Mark about Jesus;¹ but critics as a rule conclude that what Papias referred to in these words were not the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as we know them, but the primitive documents from which the present Gospels were built up by repeated enlargement and re-editing. The reasons for this conclusion cannot be given here, but they are sufficient to satisfy every unprejudiced mind.² Justin Martyr, about the same time, referred to certain "Memoirs of the Apostles," as a work or works giving information about Jesus, but it is evident that he did not here refer to any one of our Gospels; because his quotations from it or them are very unlike the language of the Gospels. Justin would not have written as he did, had he held our Gospels as apostolic narratives in his hands.³

¹ Quoted by Eusebius in "Eccl. Hist.," bk. iii. ch. xxxix.

² For a full discussion of this subject, see Meyer, Commentaries on Matthew and Mark; Reuss, Hist. of the N. T., vol. i. §§ 186, 187; and Davidson, Int. to the N. T. vol. i.

³ An exhaustive treatment of this point may be found in "Supernatural Religion," part ii. ch. iii., and in Giles's "Christian Records," ch. xiii.

When, therefore, we carefully examine the references to Jesus and his teachings contained in the Christian writings which belong to the half-century A. D. 100-150, what we find is overwhelming proof that the writers did not make use of our Gospels in their present shape, but of other writings, which have perished. They refer to incidents in the life of Jesus not mentioned in our Gospels: Jesus is said to have been born in a cave; and a fire is said to have been kindled in the Jordan at his baptism.¹ They refer to many sayings of Jesus not contained in our Gospels: Barnabas quotes this as a saying of Jesus, "Those who wish to behold me, and touch my kingdom, must through tribulation and suffering lay hold of me."² Polycarp gives this as one of Jesus' teachings, "Pity that ye may be pitied."³ And Clement represents Jesus as saying, "As ye are good, so shall good be done to you."⁴ It is evident at a glance that these writers must have had some other documents before them beside our Gospels.

¹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue, ch. lxxviii., lxxxviii.

² Epistle, ch. vii.

³ To the Philippians, ch. ii.

⁴ To the Corinthians, ch. xiii.

And we find in these writings quotations like this, "Cleave to holy men, for those who cleave to them shall be made holy," used as the exact language of Jesus, and accompanied with this remark, "It is written;"¹ but it is not so written in our Gospels, which shows that the author had some other record before him which he used as authority.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about the year 150, was the representative Christian writer and thinker of his age. He quoted about two hundred of Jesus' sayings, but in such a manner as to show that he was not using our four Gospels as his authorities; for, while in the majority of cases the ideas are similar, though not always, yet the original Greek used by Justin is radically unlike that of the parallel passages in our Gospels. If we compare a saying of Jesus containing, say, twenty-five words, as given in Justin, with the corresponding passage as given in one of our Gospels, we shall, as a rule, find about these differences: fifteen of Justin's words are different from those of the Gospel or are unrepresented by synonyms; five have different grammatical form, while only five are identical. Such facts prove that Justin did not

¹ Clement, To the Corinthians, ch. xlvii.

use our Gospels. Sanday, in his "Gospels in the Second Century," has said all that can be said to show that Justin did use our Gospels; but if one will read his chapter and then read "Supernatural Religion," part ii. ch. iii., he will see how utterly inadequate the evidence for the traditional theory is.

Now all these facts, — that those early writers made no mention of, and no direct citation from, our Gospels; that they did quote the sayings of Jesus from other documents apparently well known; also, that the gospel story as they gave it was, in language especially, unlike our gospel record, — fully establish these two conclusions: —

1. That a number of primitive gospel narratives were used long before the writings which we know as Gospels were composed.

2. That during the first half of the second century our Gospels, though doubtless in existence, had no official authority; but rather, preference was given to other sources for information respecting Jesus.

The general truth which we reach, then, is this: The materials out of which our Gospels were formed first existed for nearly half a century as oral traditions; these traditions were then written out and formed brief gospel

narratives, by the side of which a richer oral tradition continued to be used; finally, our Gospels were *edited*, near the beginning of the second century, out of these narratives and traditions, and they embrace the substance, but not all, of what was then known about Jesus; yet they only slowly gained authority, and there was no absolutely uniform text or form of the story of Jesus' doings and sayings during the second century.

There are differences of opinion among our great Biblical scholars respecting both the date of the first three Gospels and the order of their production. Luke is, however, placed after Matthew by all, and assigned in its present shape to about A.D. 110. Whether Mark is prior to Matthew, or the reverse, is a point of great dispute.¹ Whichever opinion may be true, the final editors who put them in their present shape must have done their work somewhere in the score of years A.D. 90-110. But it must be remembered that doubtless all contain passages much older than these dates, — fragments taken from the

¹ The priority of Matthew is ably defended by Davidson, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. i., and by Keim, *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. i.; while the priority of Mark is upheld by Reuss, *History of the New Testament*, vol. i. §§ 189-191.

earlier and primitive Gospels. Matthew, in its later chapters, contains paragraphs which must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; and from this fact it has been argued that the whole work was composed before that date. The fact, however, simply proves that in its present shape it was built up from materials some of which were written as early as that date. Its baptismal formula, on the other hand (Matthew xxviii. 19), unknown to apostolic times, proves that this portion was written toward the close of the first century. Reuss, in discussing the date of Matthew, brings out this point clearly: "The problem of the age of this work is no longer a simple one, when different constituents have once been pointed out in it. The fact that subsequent writers knew nothing whatever of them shows the imperfect character of their information. It is certain that some of the discourses of Jesus, as they are here found, were written down before the destruction of Jerusalem, and tolerably shortly before. From this it may perhaps be inferred that the extant revision was made, at the earliest, in the last quarter of the first century."¹

¹ History of the New Testament, vol. i. § 196.

We must therefore look upon our Gospels as comparatively late compilations, which aimed to give a fuller gospel history than had before existed in written form. And it was the desire for completeness which led to those additions that continued to be made to them for some years after they were first put in circulation. Men wanted the fullest possible knowledge of Jesus; and if they came across a valuable tradition not contained in their manuscript copy of the Gospel, they added it to their copy, — a process by which all our Gospels have been enriched. A notable example of this method of enlargement is furnished by Mark, — the last twelve verses of which were so added.¹ This process continued as late as the fifth century, as the marginal notes of the Revised Version of the New Testament so fully show, — a fact which proves that the text was not absolutely fixed even at that time.

If we look at the nineteenth chapter of Matthew or the ninth chapter of Luke, in the Revised Version of 1881, we shall see it stated in the margin in a half-dozen places that “many ancient authorities” give different readings, — a fact which proves to the dullest

¹ See Revised Version of 1881.

mind that no supernatural providence watched over the transmission of our text or guaranteed its accuracy; and it also shows how far our text is removed from an autograph copy of the original, while it suggests that there may be many other variations which we cannot discover, because, having no manuscripts belonging to the second or third centuries, we possess no means by which we can trace changes in those centuries, when changes were doubtless more common than afterwards.¹

Now it is evident that as men began to depend more and more upon written Gospels, these larger writings would crowd aside the earlier and briefer ones; some of which were finally rejected and lost because they were used chiefly by heretical parties. The influence of the great metropolitan churches was also decisive. They were in a position to decide what were best; and their decision became the rule of Christendom. And so our Gospels survived out of a consid-

¹ See, for a brief history of the text, Scrivener, *Six Lectures on the Text of the New Testament*. Compare also two articles on the Revision of 1881: *London Quarterly*, October, 1881; *Contemporary Review*, December, 1881.

erable mass of gospel literature; and they survived not by formal or official act, but because general use selected them as fittest to survive.

What has been said applies especially to our first three Gospels; but the general principle set forth applies also to the Fourth, commonly called John's Gospel; which was, however, a later and more deliberate composition. Its author, not the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, doubtless had access to a line of gospel-traditions somewhat different from those contained in the other three; but he used his materials freely, not so much to give a historical portraiture of Jesus as to illustrate and justify his own theological conception of Jesus.

This Gospel is thus the investiture of Jesus with the Logos conception, the doctrine of a Creative Word, standing between the nameless One and nature,—a conception which, rooted in Platonism, was at this time being worked out in detail at Alexandria.¹

The three chief arguments for this conclusion are: First, The radical difference between the portrait of Jesus as given here and in the other Gospels. It is not a picture of

¹ See Drummond, *Philo Judaeus*, book iii. ch. vi.

the same man from a different point of view, but of an absolutely different personality. This difference has been well stated by James Martineau: "The concrete language of life, born in the field, the boat, the olive-ground, is exchanged for the abstract forms of philosophical conception,—the terse maxims of conduct and epigrams of moral wisdom, for doctrinal enigmas and hinted mysteries of sentiment. The simple directness with which, in the earlier reports, the speaker advances to his end, and leaves it, is here replaced by the windings of subtle reflection, and the repetitions of unsatisfied controversy. We pass from the breath and sunshine of the hills to the studious air and nocturnal lamp of the library; and exchange the music of living voices, never twice the same, for a monotonous pitch of speech, which flows unvaried through the lips of Jesus or the historian, of Nicodemus or the woman of Samaria, of this disciple or of that." ¹

Second, The differences between this Gospel and Revelation show that one man could not have written both. These differences extend from the details of form to the fun-

¹ The Fourth Gospel, Old and New, vol. x. p. 204. See also Keim, Jesus of Nazara, vol. i. p. 152 *et seq.*

damental questions of providence and the mission of Jesus. The Greek of Revelation is the most awkward and incorrect in the New Testament, that of the Fourth Gospel the most elegant; the standpoint of Revelation is Jerusalem, that of the Fourth Gospel the Cosmos itself; the spirit of Revelation is intensely Jewish, that of the Fourth Gospel broadly cosmopolitan; the Messianic hope is prominent in Revelation, but wholly absent from the Fourth Gospel; Jesus in Revelation glorifies Judaism by exhibiting the wrath of God upon its enemies, in the Fourth Gospel he is a power of light winning men by spiritual attraction; in Revelation expectation centres on the day of judgment as an impending calamity to the earth, in the Fourth Gospel believers already possess eternal life, while judgment is a spiritual process. Such differences compel the conclusion that one was written by a Jewish seer, while the other is the work of a Gentile philosopher. And as Revelation was undoubtedly the work of John, it follows that the Gospel could not have been from his hand. The judgment of Reuss is this: "The two types of Christian teaching presented in the Fourth Gospel and in the book of the Revelation

could not exist simultaneously in the same mind.”¹

Third, The work itself bears evidences of being the writing of one little acquainted with the habits of Palestinian Jews,—an ignorance such as John could not have displayed. Davidson wisely remarks, “The way in which the Jews are spoken of is vague, indicating a relation foreign to that people. The writer seems to occupy a position distant from their religion and customs.”² The prominence everywhere in the Fourth Gospel of a dogmatic purpose, the suppression of those details which show Jesus’ dependence upon Judaism, the sameness of style in the narrative and in the speeches of Jesus, and many other facts, prove that it is not a strict record, but a poetical and speculative treatment of Jesus’ life.³ It evidently contains much of the spirit of Jesus and records many facts

¹ Apostolic Age, vol. ii. p. 507. See also, Tayler, *The Fourth Gospel*, Section Second.

² Introduction to the New Testament, vol. ii. p. 399.

³ It is an interesting and prophetic fact that in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January, 1880 (p. 90), one of its editors, Dr. Duff, in an article on “The Theological Use of the Bible,” used this language: “The Fourth Gospel, whose apostolic author took the best means to conceal his identity, is no report at all, but a series of sermons on Jesus, giving systematically the writer’s own mode of regarding him.”

respecting his career, but it is not a report which can be used for exact historical information. The events of Jesus' life are there idealized, and the author has often so fused his own thought with the teaching of Jesus that we cannot hold Jesus responsible for all that is there attributed to him. This conclusion is one upon which great scholars are approaching unanimity.

Now several important conclusions are justified by these discoveries of modern scholarship respecting the method by which the gospel records were produced.

1. We are prepared to set down as legendary what has long been regarded as historical. Works so constructed could not fail to contain legendary material. To deny this, to insist that the gospel texts bear the stamp of absolute infallibility, to contend that we have there nothing but the exact record of what Jesus said and did, is simply to shut our eyes to the light and to ignore results of investigations that have been most reverent and accurate. Therefore what is said about Jesus' birth, about his temptation, about his re-appearances after the crucifixion, and about his ascension must be looked upon as legendary.

These written Gospels we must ever remember did not create the Church, but were created by it in a very uncritical age. They are neither fabrications nor revelations, but records of traditions which started in the reports made by men who knew and loved Jesus, and who intended to tell the truth; but these reports had been out of their keeping for two generations and had been worked over by many other persons before they were given their final shape. That they were attempts to give a true account of Jesus is certain; but that they are absolutely accurate accounts is manifestly impossible. The truth is well stated by Keim: "It must, however, be admitted that every word is not a saying nor every narrative a history of Jesus. . . . In one particular the sayings in Matthew, and indeed in the other Gospels, may have been obscured, not only in their connection, but in their substance,—in the revelations of the future. Much is here given to the mouth of Jesus which expressed the watching, the desire, and confidence of the believers, and which was in after times the solace of those who thus waited."¹

2. Works so constructed would naturally

¹ Jesus of Nazara, vol. i. p. 91 *et seq.*

contain many contradictions. And since Strauss's searching analysis hardly a first-class scholar has maintained the opposite. Even such men as the pious Neander have admitted that the Gospels contain inaccuracies, while conservative critics like Meyer no longer deny such contradictions. If any one will place in parallel columns the different accounts of the calling of the apostles, of the last supper, or of the resurrection,—of which Meyer remarks, "To harmonize these divergent accounts is impossible,"¹—or if he will consult a candid work like Giles's "Christian Records," he will see that there are contradictions which no sophistry can obscure and which no ingenuity can remove.

3. These writings certainly do not afford any adequate evidence of miracles. It used to be said that the Gospels afford us the reports of four eye-witnesses, whose testimony must be accepted or all the moral truth therein contained be rejected. But as Picton says, "As well might heathen priests tell the doubters of their mythology that if they cease to worship the sun there is no justification for their feeling the warmth of his beams or the joy of [Nature's] revival at spring-

¹ Commentary on Matthew, p. 522.

time.”¹ The facts, however, already stated show how far these narratives in their present shape are removed from the reports of eye-witnesses. But though these writings are wholly incompetent to serve as evidence to prove such miracles, yet we may accept their general accuracy; for, naturally, they are most unreliable just where they touch the region of the supernatural.

The demand often urged by the defenders of traditional theology, Accept all or reject all; believe every text as absolute truth or put all aside as a forgery, is supremely irrational and involves a principle which we use nowhere else. We reject Macaulay’s account of William Penn, and yet we read his history with delight and profit. The writers and editors of the Gospels must be judged with reference to their age, when belief in miracles was a part of every man’s intellectual furnishing. And it was inevitable that this belief should show itself in their accounts of Jesus, however honestly they wrote. What we have to eliminate is not fraud, but the product of unregulated fancy. This point is well taken by Dr. Abbott: “If we once admit that miracles were certain to be attributed to Jesus,

¹ *Modern Review*, January, 1881, p. 173.

whether he wrought them or not, because they would be assumed as necessary both by Jews and Gentiles, both by friends and foes, then all suspicion of dishonesty vanishes at once, and the non-miraculous element remains as credible as ever.”¹

And again, the moral truth and spiritual power of these Gospels are no more dependent upon the absolute truthfulness of their statements respecting wonders, than the beauty of Shakspeare upon a belief in the reality of the ghosts which he brings into his dramas. When the Gospels are viewed in the light of these facts, it does not seem strange that we find there the story of the miracle at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee; and when we put it aside as a legendary embellishment, the Beatitudes seem no less divine.

4. It is evident also that these records are colored by the personal beliefs of their writers and compilers. They were all written to prove and illustrate certain beliefs about Jesus; and being so written, they all show the presence of tendencies which shaped the material for a dogmatic purpose. For we must remember that primitive Christianity was not a homogeneous movement, but a cluster of

¹ Oxford Sermons, p. lvii.

opposing tendencies and antagonistic parties. There was a Jewish tendency, a Hellenic tendency, and afterwards a Gnostic tendency; the party of James, the party of Paul, and then the party represented by the Fourth Gospel. And those early strifes left their marks on the gospel records. The writers of the Gospels, then, were not primarily historians, but advocates of a doctrine; they wrote to advance a certain religious theory; and however honest their intentions, such a personal bias would show itself throughout the length and breadth of their work.

In Matthew, Jesus is represented with great care as the fulfilment of the law; the narrative is shaped to show that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. This Gospel contains more Old Testament quotations than all the others. Everywhere we meet a Jewish flavor. Old Testament passages are applied to Jesus in the most unwarranted fashion. And in some places it is evident that ardent fancy has created certain features in order that Jesus' career might bear a closer likeness to the prophetic ideal.

But in reading Luke we find ourselves in a different atmosphere; there is a broader horizon and a freer spirit. Here are indi-

cations of a Pauline influence. The genealogy of Jesus is traced to Adam, the father of the race, rather than to Abraham, the father of the Hebrews. In Luke vi. 36, we find, "Be ye therefore merciful;" whereas in Matthew v. 48, we read, "Be ye therefore perfect," — the latter reminding us of the law, the former reporting Paul's idea of grace. Also, Jesus is represented by Luke as associating more freely with Gentiles, and as looking at the world outside Judaism with greater sympathy.

Again, in the Fourth Gospel, more emphasis is placed upon the person of Jesus. We touch here a later age, when people were debating the rank of Jesus. There is here no Sermon on the Mount, but a great deal about Jesus' relation to God, — a theme never discussed in the other Gospels. There is no human development, no growth of incidents, no relations to humanity; speculative considerations are paramount. We feel that we are dealing not so much with a personality as with a philosophical abstraction. The conclusion is forced upon us that the writer used his material to illustrate a theory, rather than to paint a portrait.

And yet none of the Gospels is exactly

homogeneous, as no one person contributed all its materials. As each was made up from a variety of sources, being a compilation of different documents, the characteristics of each contributor would show through, though the compiler might be careful to shape all to his liking. Therefore, as each Gospel is a growth, not a homogeneous composition, it is not pervaded by one tendency alone. The original spirit of the nucleus, written while Jewish ideas were strong in the Church, is not wholly obscured, though the newer parts are more catholic. These differences are evident to the careful student.

5. And though they grew up in this free manner, yet these gospel records alone prove the greatness of Jesus. They testify to a devotion which only a sublime personality could have inspired; they give glimpses of power such as only a supreme genius could have exercised; but the Church that treasured them is the chief illustration and proof of his power and nobility.

The disciples were neither capable of fully understanding Jesus nor of reporting him with absolute accuracy.¹ In the process of handing down that oral tradition some of his

¹ See Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, chap. vi.

thoughts would be obscured by being mixed with their own notions; and works edited from such material would necessarily contain some unhistorical matter. Yet, however long carried in memory or whenever written out, they give much of his spirit and many facts respecting his life, but not a full nor an infallible account of his mission.

The Gospels, then, contain enough of the mind of Jesus to make them reasonably accurate records of his life, and they afford us a priceless treasure of truth; still we must read them with open eyes, as well as reverent hearts; and we must remember that the Living God is our God, to be found in our souls rather than in a text, and to be served by love and purity, rather than by unreasoning faith.

JESUS OF NAZARETH.

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6. Fisher, The Beginnings of Christianity, ch. ii.-vii.
7. Reuss, Apostolic Age, vol. i. book i.
8. Ewald, History of Israel, vol. vi. pp. 1-136.

B. SIX GREAT LIVES OF JESUS:

1. Keim, Jesus of Nazara, especially vols. ii. and vi.
Exhaustive and critical, yet reverent.
2. Hausrath, New Testament Times, vol. ii. sixth division.
Clear, comprehensive, and very admirable.
3. Hooykaas, Bible for Learners, vol. iii. book i.
Rational in spirit and popular in form.
4. Renan, Life of Jesus.
A vivid but inadequate portraiture.
5. Weiss, The Life of Jesus.
Broad and elaborate, but limited by the traditional bias.
6. Ewald, History of Israel, vol. vi.
Diffuse and often fanciful, but learned and suggestive.

C. THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

1. Wilson, New Testament Parables.
For young children.
2. Brown, The Life of Jesus.
For children from ten to twelve years old.
3. Frothingham, Stories from the Lips of the Teacher.
For children from twelve to fourteen years old.
4. Gannett, The Childhood of Jesus.
Rich in hints for parent and teacher.
5. Clodd, Jesus of Nazareth.
For young men and women.

JESUS OF NAZARETH.

THE word "Jesus" has more historic significance than any other name in the annals of the human race. No other name has entered with such transforming and sanctifying influence into the affairs of man. The words "Buddha" and "Confucius" have been reverently spoken by more people, but those people have been comparatively monotonous masses. But how marvellous in character, in variety, and in number are the creations that have sprung up about Jesus to perpetuate his power, to spread his gospel, and to expound the mystery of his person! What literary activities have clustered about that name! And now, at the end of nearly twenty centuries, the freshest book from the press, most eagerly sought by scholar and peasant, finding its way into the heart of Africa, through the jungles of India, into the seaports of China, is one that robes that figure in some new thought or sentiment.

On every hand, among the cities of Europe,

over all other structures, rise cathedrals in their massive grandeur, — the gospel of Jesus put into stone. And the cross, the symbol of the heroism and pathos of his life, has become the great word in a universal language of the heart. What mountain on whose bleak crags its shadow does not fall! What city over whose teeming life its arms do not glisten! What isle of the sea where it is not planted at the head of some grave! When we look at any art-collection in the world, on every hand we see that genius has striven to immortalize that name. The history of the Christ of art tells the story of European art for twenty centuries. And to perpetuate the accents of that mystery has been the inspiration of music.

Who can number the theological systems that have clustered about Jesus, in these three-score generations? What labyrinths of speculation! Councils have been called from the ends of the earth to decide questions relative to his nature and message. What infinite range of ideas has been covered by that name! Men have read into that word "Jesus" everything, from pure humanity to absolute Deity.

Some of the greatest political movements of the race have been associated with that

name. The Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Saxon Reformation, the voyage of the Pilgrims to America in search of an asylum for their faith, — these movements illustrate the historic significance of the Christ. To-day the Pope rules at Rome in the name of Jesus over an ecclesiastical system which is the most marvellous exhibition of administration that was ever created; which embraces in its designs the whole race, and touches by its influence every land and people; and which promises an assured perpetuity, in strange contrast to the fluctuating fortunes of ordinary dynasties. And the civilization that now encircles the globe; that holds the unexhausted energies and leavening powers of the race; that surrounds barbarism and contracts its limits; that fraternizes the nations; that breaks the slave's chains, levels the walls of caste, and dissipates the darkness of superstition, — is *christened* in honor of Jesus. We cannot say, as it was once said, that the forces of civilization all flow from Jesus as from a fountain, — they must be regarded as inherent in human nature itself; yet it is a fact of history that where that name has gone, there has been the highway of humanity. The horoscope divides the races of the future

between Muhammed and Jesus; and while Islam can do more for Pagan nations than the Church, yet the civilization connected with the name of Jesus will be dominant, because it contains the garnered riches of the centuries, and its races possess the maturer manhood.

The relation of Jesus to personal religion,—to the ideal and aspiration of individual souls,—though not unique, is supreme; he does not stand alone, and yet he is pre-eminent. The influence of Aristotle is scholastic; he shapes the form of man's thought. The influence of Muhammed is disciplinary; he harnesses men into new habits. The influence of Confucius is didactic; he teaches people a code of morals, a system of conduct. The influence of Buddha is exemplary; he illustrates an attitude of self-renunciation. But the influence of Jesus is personal, putting us into companionship with a great Life. Thus Christianity, under all its creeds and ecclesiasticisms, has been a *personal religion*. Men, brought into contact with Jesus, have felt themselves in the presence of a lovable and loving person,—a man of thought, but not a teacher like Aristotle; a master, but not a disciplinarian like Muhammed; a moral

leader, but not a tutor like Confucius; a perfect man, but not the one type like Buddha. Jesus has stood for a tender intimacy and creative inspiration which no other prophet has ever inspired. There is respect for Muhammed, reverence of Confucius, imitation of Buddha, but love for Jesus, — him men have taken into their hearts. Jesus has been a personal presence or ideal force that has built itself into human life. Men have kept the Jesus who walked through the fields of Galilee in their most intimate and loving fellowship. Nothing like this is true to the same extent of any other person in history. And that great historic institution, the Church, has built everywhere shrines to his memory, and has planted in all lands the symbols of his gospel. We must then ascend this stream of influence to gain some closer and clearer view of the personality of Jesus, and to read the lineaments of that character which has shed over the centuries such light and love.

Let us then look at the Christian Church as it existed about the year A. D. 150. We find there the thought of one, holy, loving, and almighty God, who was worshipped as the Father with infinite trust and tenderest reverence. The words of the Apostles' Creed,

which are "ethnic, and belong to all nations,"¹ are these: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."² A very little reflection will show how general this ethical monotheism was among enlightened and earnest men throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian movement. Hillel had called Jehovah the Divine Tenderness;³ Philo had named him the Ineffable Spirit;⁴ that unconscious Christian, Plutarch, wrote reverently of God as the Father of the World; Seneca taught that God is a Father magnificent, who tries and trains with kindly authority the children whom he loves with a paternal but robust affection, while he spoke of benevolence as the great necessity of life, and named death "the birthday of eternal life."⁵ Such religious and moral elements existed far and wide, and they were the materials of which the Church was made, being organized in it by a central attraction. Yet there was something new in

¹ The words of Goethe, used and approved by Stanley, *Christian Institutions*, ch. xiv., "The Creed of the Early Christians."

² Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. i.

³ Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, Excursus v.

⁴ Drummond, *Philo Judaeus*, book iii. ch. iv.

⁵ Zeller, *Stoics*, etc., ch. ix.

quality and original in power about this thought of God's fatherhood as it existed in the Church. It was there translated into a living sentiment, being inrooted as a life-motive; it ruled as a religious conviction in a more direct and explicit manner. And this difference lay chiefly in the fact that the Church presented monotheism—belief in the fatherhood of God—as one of the organic principles of an institution, rather than as merely a private opinion. For there is vast difference in dynamic power between an individual notion respecting God, and the same conception when it has become the bond of union and common conviction of an association of men. And just this difference, among others, separated such society as that composed by men like Seneca from the Church.

We find in the Church itself a social organism, based upon equality, inspired by love of domestic purity and public justice, impelled by sympathy, and engaged in the ministries of self-help and beneficence. It was an institution not wholly original; the Jews had their synagogue,¹ which was temple, schoolhouse, and office of charities,—the mother of the Church itself; the philosophers had their

¹ Schürer, *The Jewish People*, vol. ii. § 27.

school, and the common people had their beneficiary associations;¹ yet a new spirit resided and presided in the Church; it was a type of social union with a humaner scope, with a more ethical atmosphere and a more practical impulse than anything else then in existence. And the importance of the Church as a social organization, administered upon the principle of equality, has never been adequately treated by ecclesiastical historians. Here was an organic power, more worthy study and of vaster influence than any dogma; and it was this power which reorganized European institutions. We never make a greater mistake than when we suppose that it was Christianity as a creed which regenerated European society: it was rather Christianity as a kind of life, a moral sentiment organized as a social institution.

We find also in the Church a strict and lofty moral ideal. Its members have often been painted as too good, and their non-Christian neighbors as too sinful; for while better than the masses, yet Christians then were not so much superior to some outside their bounds as is generally claimed.²

¹ Felton, *Greece, Ancient and Modern*, Lecture vii. Second Series.

² See Merivale, *The Romans under the Empire*, vol. vi. ch. liv.

Thus, we find that the Church was not an absolute creation *de novo*, nor wholly unrelated to the surrounding civilization, but rather an institution which was rooted in the past, and which drew its elements from existing society; yet in its piety there was a new flavor, in its social ministries a new spirit, in its moral sentiments a new intensity; all of which can be explained only upon the supposition that those previously existing elements received a new life by their organization about a sublime personality.

And if we look closely at the people who constituted the Church in those ages, we find that they referred the ideal, inspiration, and authority of this new life to a certain great person, dearly beloved, — Jesus of Nazareth. And among them, aside from all written accounts, there existed a common oral tradition, by which Jesus' teachings were published, in which floated a picture of his character, and from which men learned to attribute a certain virtue to his death and resurrection. The quality of individual life, the spirit of that organism, the tradition itself, all argue a sublime personality as the source of this phenomenon. Therefore we may say that if we had nothing else but that institution, — the

Church as it existed about the year A. D. 150, — we should have sufficient evidence that Jesus had taught a divine doctrine with authority, that he had lived a grand life, and that he had touched men with vast inspiration.

Though the Christians of that time were loaded down with immense superstitions, innumerable errors, and absurd fancies, showing that no supernatural agent was operative in their midst, yet there was a something, — a moral ideal, an ardent hope, a method of life, a reverent faith, a humane sentiment, — which must have descended from a high source; while there was a loving attitude and personal devotion toward Jesus which revealed him as the chief source of the influence that made the Church the centre of a peculiar and superior life, and proved that great attractive power resided in him. Now, stopping here, we should know something of Jesus' teaching; for that oral tradition furnished Clement, Justin Martyr, and the author of the Shepherd of Hermas, with sayings of the Master which are preserved for us in their works. But from these sources alone we should know very little of his life; his biography would be very brief, and the details of his career very few.

Yet the evidences of his influence, the impression of his personality, would stand out clear and distinct.

If we now go to the first three Gospels, we find ourselves in the immediate vicinity of that character. We hear him in the synagogue at Capernaum, see him on the Galilean hillsides, and follow him to Jerusalem. Even these are only glimpses, and somewhat distant, too; and yet they afford us a clearer view. Here and there a veil of mist drops between, and we say that this or that is legend. The greatest of living English Biblical scholars, Samuel Davidson, makes this statement respecting the presence of legend in the gospel records, — a statement remarkable alike for its reverent tone and for its critical insight: “A mythic haze encompasses the person, life, and discourses of Jesus; and sober criticism must set about the task of removing it reverently, respecting tradition without superstitiously adopting it. After this is done, there stands forth in colors more or less distinct, a person such as the world never saw before, — the living type of an ideal humanity, pure and perfect, destined to influence all times, to purify all peoples among whom his name is known, and to ennoble his

followers by lifting them up to the measure of his stature.”¹

That legends should grow up about Jesus was inevitable. All history shows a like tendency working about such sublime characters. And when we bear in mind the method by which our gospel records were produced, our wonder is, not that legend is there, but that it is there in so small quantity and of such sober quality. The fact that the Messianic hope of the time had been centred on Jesus, explains the origin of nearly all the legends which cluster about him; and this fact makes it much easier to remove the legendary elements from the Gospels, while it saves us from the necessity of attributing deliberate misrepresentation to those who told and compiled the stories which form the record. The legendary parts of the Gospels, then, may be looked upon as the unconscious elaboration of the narrative of Jesus' life, brought about by the working of the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Whatever is strongly colored with the Messianic hope may be eliminated as legendary in its present form.

That circle of stories respecting Jesus' birth at Bethlehem are the spontaneous pro-

¹ Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. p. 364.

duct of reverent love, working under the direction of the belief in him as Messiah. Little was known of Jesus' early life, but devout imagination could not leave the period blank; so that, starting from a prophecy which seemed to point to Bethlehem as his birthplace, and which they felt must have been fulfilled, his disciples, little by little, wove a legend full of the Master's spirit, which locates his birth at Bethlehem. It was not invented, — it simply grew; and what we have is not the original germ, but the full-grown product. That original germ may have been simply the suggestion that Jesus was born there, or ought to have been born there. The next disciple to tell the story went from suggestion to assertion, and added the Magi; the next brought in the angel choir, and little by little the other elements were added. The working motive all the while aimed to connect Jesus with the Messianic hope; and there were two generations in which the legend had time to grow before it was written out as we have it. We can only suggest how it grew; all we know is that legends do grow in this way, and that we have every reason to look upon this as a legend, because all the facts prove that Jesus

was born in Nazareth, while the story itself, by appealing to prophecy, shows its own origin and motive. These birth-stories, then, are legends which have no root in reality, but were brought into existence to cover an unknown part of Jesus' life, and especially to cover it in a manner that would connect Jesus with the Messianic predictions. They bear the marks of legend on their very face, as such scholars as Meyer admit;¹ and it is perfectly plain where they came from, when we consider how ardent was their belief in Jesus as Messiah, and when we consider also that they are in perfect keeping with the tendencies of that time.

In such stories as those of the Temptation and the Transfiguration, we may believe that there was a nucleus of fact from which they started. Some such incidents may have happened; but the reality has been so obscured by poetic description that we cannot tell what actually occurred. And in this embellishment of the narrative we trace the influence of that ever present belief in Jesus' Messiahship which colored all their thoughts and shaped all materials to its own purposes.

A majority of the accounts of miracles re-

¹ Commentary on Matthew, pp. 56-70.

late to healings, and especially the healing of demoniacs, — that is, persons whom we to-day would call insane or epileptic. And undoubtedly Jesus possessed the power to help those disorders, — what Canon Fremantle calls “the restorative power of a great personality.”¹ And any one acquainted with what Pinel accomplished with violent lunatics by his purely moral method of treatment will not be inclined to doubt the influence of Jesus over such persons, while he will see here no display of supernatural power. And nearly all of these accounts have legendary touches, which were added by that Messianic belief in order to bring Jesus more closely into relation with the predictions of what the Messiah must be and do. The healings of the dumb and the lame are especially enveloped with a legendary nimbus. For Isaiah prophesied, as they understood the passage, that Messiah would cause the dumb to speak and the lame to walk. So that whatever Jesus may have done in this line would necessarily be enlarged upon to bring it into harmony with the supposed predictions of the ancient prophet.

What Jesus is reported to have said, espe-

¹ “Theology under Changed Conditions,” *Fortnightly Review*, March, 1887.

cially in Matthew xxiv.-xxv., and in Mark xiii., respecting the end of the world and his re-appearance as the judge of mankind, cannot be historical. These statements contain the coarse and materialistic elements of the Messianic hope common, in that age, among certain classes of Jews. The very phrases and imagery are those then current in the most fanatical section of Judaism. But the pre-eminence of Jesus lay in his moral and spiritual interpretation of the Messianic hope. In his more authentic addresses he always pictures the kingdom of heaven as the reign of righteousness. And it cannot be possible that he descended from that elevation and talked like one of the narrowest of his countrymen, as these statements would indicate. The truth is that here we have, not the mind of Jesus, but the thought of his reporters.¹ There are then legendary materials in the gospel records which must be set aside as not descriptive of what Jesus ever actually did or said. But these passages are easily detected and removed, because they are just those parts where the Messianic coloring is most intense. Therefore passages which reveal an

¹ Davidson, Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. p. 401.

evident purpose to connect Jesus with the Messianic hope, in its common and crude interpretation, may be put aside without question as somewhat legendary in character.

Yet after all these passages are removed from the gospel record — passages due to the legendary tendency working with the Messianic bias of his reporters, — still a solid remnant is left, though it is doubtless impossible to recover Jesus' exact image. We know that his life as a young man was that of an artisan; if not expressly stated we should know it from the character of his language, which is full of figurative expressions drawn from that vocation.¹ He became, we cannot tell just when, a preacher of righteousness; and as such, he possessed and exhibited great independence of spirit, remarkable knowledge of human nature, a large capacity for using fresh and striking illustrations, and a moral insight which, with little regard for conventionalities, went straight to the heart of difficult problems and enabled him to speak with commanding authority.

The superhuman character attributed to Jesus has done much to obscure his human personality. Too little attention has been

¹ Hausrath, *New Testament Times*, vol. ii. p. 131.

paid to the evidences of his intellectual power. The problem of his education is more difficult than that of Shakspeare, but it is plain that he possessed remarkable mental acumen and strength. His perceptive powers were very acute; the infinitely varied phenomena of nature and the minutest details of human life were known to him. His knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures was large and accurate; he quoted its texts freely, but he applied them with an independence which showed great original thought and proved that he was no slavish follower of the Scribes. His rational faculty was highly developed; for only by the aid of reason could he have freed himself from so much of the fanaticism and superstition of his time; while only by great intellectual penetration could he have defended himself from his enemies as he did, meeting them with questions and arguments which brought on them confusion, silence, and defeat. All these facts show that Jesus was a man of remarkable mental power.

And Jesus was by no means a soft and effeminate man, which is the character ascribed to him by many popular representations. The ordinary portraiture of him presents Jesus in too passive an attitude, lacking in virility.

This conception has grown up from the feeling that a God-Man ought not to manifest such qualities as anger or resentment. But the conception which represents Jesus as over-abundant in sweetness yet lacking in rugged human strength is not true to the record. Jesus had the capacity of anger; he was a master of the vocabulary of denunciation; he resented abuse and condemned injustice; the flames of a righteous wrath were not strangers to his breast. Even the reverent Merriam goes so far as to say: "Toward the Pharisees he used a fierceness of invective which indicates the natural limitations of a human reformer and a young and Jewish reformer."¹

And yet, looking at Jesus' character as a whole, the qualities that appear pre-eminent are infinite kindness and compassion. He stands before us as a man who was tender to the poor, the lowly, the sinful; the friend of the outcast, but ever using his sympathy to convince of sin and to inspire with hope; a man who revered the sanctity of human nature in whatever condition found, appreciated its divine yearnings, and sought to heal its woe

¹ Merriam, "The Character of Jesus," in *The Way of Life*, p. 46.

and unfold its nobler possibilities. The Gospels, which are more the fragmentary impressions of a great life than its clear portrait, present Jesus as one who went about doing good in a very simple, unselfish, and practical manner; who awoke in men wherever he went the slumbering divinity of their hearts; and who gathered a company of disciples that hung upon his words and grew strong in his presence.

Jesus, being conscious of his equality with those who framed the Mosaic laws, considered himself entitled to examine and pass upon what he found there, "in order to free the grain from the chaff and to loosen the imperishable truth from the temporal form which held it enclosed and threatened to stifle it."¹ He was therefore able, in a word, both to practise himself and to recommend in his preaching to others the purely spiritual religion of the heart. We see in Jesus a great teacher guided by free reason, and yet a reformer tempered with reverence. The Gospels picture him as indifferent about the stricter Sabbath regulations, as free in his handling of the traditions of the fathers, as unmindful of the Levitical rules in his inter-

¹ Kuenen, *Religion of Israel*, vol. iii. p. 279.

course with people; and yet he claimed to stand for the essential truth of the Law and the Prophets.

This freedom and independence brought him into conflict with the authorities. But the details of his closing days are uncertain; all we positively know is that he went to Jerusalem and was crucified. The story of his conflict with the Pharisees is obscurely told; we only have glimpses of his trial, which must have been very irregular.¹ The record of the crucifixion is contradictory and fragmentary.² Of Jesus' teachings as given in the Gospels, we may be sure that the Sermon on the Mount is substantially authentic, though a collection of sayings delivered on different occasions. The parables, as a rule, are doubtless given about as Jesus spoke them; while the short, striking sayings may be regarded as nearest his exact words.

The epistles of Paul, though written many years before the Gospels, do not give us so

¹ A very ingenious and suggestive theory respecting the motives which brought about and the course of events which led up to Jesus' death has been presented by Rabbi Wise, in a pamphlet entitled, *The Martyrdom of Jesus Christ*. See also "The Trial of Jesus," *Contemporary Review*, vol. xxx. 1877.

² Keim, *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. vi. pp. 115-244.

clear a picture of Jesus. Paul did not know Jesus personally, and to him the biographical details respecting Jesus seem to have had little attraction. This great apostle gave his attention to nothing in the history of Jesus but his death and resurrection. Of his crucifixion Paul wrote no description; while he gave no exact information respecting the resurrection itself, but contented himself with recording a few instances of what were considered his re-appearances. And Paul passed by the teachings of Jesus with scarcely a brief allusion. But this silence of Paul's letters was doubtless due, not to indifference or ignorance on his part, but to the fact that such of his writings as we possess are simply letters written with a definite reference to certain passing events, to persons who, being familiar with the story of Jesus, did not need instruction on that point. And, moreover, to Paul, Jesus was the centre of a cosmical system, the actor in a great world-drama; so that the features of the historic Nazarene are in his letters overlaid and obscured by Paul's conception of Jesus as a cosmical being, or the Second Adam. And yet, just here are evidences of Jesus' wonderful influence. Jesus must have been an immense personality and have

produced a powerful impression, or Paul would not have made him the centre of his marvellous speculations. Thus, while with Paul's letters alone we should have no biography of Jesus at all, yet we should see in them the impress and inspiration of a sublime character.

The results which we reach, then, are these: in the Gospels we have many details of Jesus' life, but nothing like a satisfactory record of his career; we cannot be sure that he did all that is reported of him, while we must reject some things recorded in those narratives. We cannot be certain that we have his exact words in many places, or even that we always possess his exact thought; and yet everywhere—in Gospels, Pauline letters, and the Church itself,—we trace an impression which proves a supreme personality.

This obscurity on the one hand and this profound impression on the other make it difficult for us to define his relations to his age; and yet certain things are clear. Some writers have made Jesus the disciple of Hillel;¹ and Clifford even went so far as to call his gospel the ethics of Hillel.² But the

¹ For the best estimate of Hillel, see Ewald, *History of Israel*, vi. pp. 13-36.

² *Lectures and Essays*, vol. ii. p. 229.

differences between the two are decisive evidence against such a theory. Hillel was a very gentle, pure, and earnest teacher, an honor to the Hebrew race and an ornament to humanity. He taught the Golden Rule in nearly the same form as we find it in the Gospel, and some of his observations upon life are remarkably wise and helpful; yet while his tendency was liberal, he had extricated neither of his feet wholly from the fetters of tradition, though he walked with more freedom than his fellow-scribes. But Hillel is chiefly interesting because he shows that an age and people which could produce him could by a supreme effort produce a Jesus of Nazareth. And still Jesus was in no sense a disciple of Hillel. Their methods were different; one appealed to the heart, the other to a text; and all the world lies between. The one made life a free inspiration, the other made life a conformity to law. The one still insisted on the Levitical order with great emphasis, the other put supreme emphasis on purity of heart; and though the moral teachings of both present striking similarities, yet, as Oort remarks, two men may almost agree in such precepts and yet have radically unlike views of life, because

they come to such precepts from opposite directions,—as was the case here. Hillel reached the Golden Rule by approaching life from the side of Mosaism; but Jesus reached the gospel by interpreting life from the standpoint of universal humanity. Their words were similar, but the men themselves were radically unlike in method and spirit; and the system of each would necessarily bear vastly different fruit, as history has shown.¹ Still, these differences no more warrant the supposition of Jesus' supernatural rank than Garrison's superiority of moral insight over that of the clergy of his day warrants a claim of miraculous character for him. Plato's superiority to the Sophists is hardly less than that of Jesus to Hillel; and yet no such claim is made for Plato.

It has been claimed that Jesus was closely related to the Essenes,² that monastic order of Jewish reformers to which John the Baptist undoubtedly belonged. These Essenes formed a communistic organization, semi-

¹ For a discussion of this interesting subject, see Oort, "The Talmud and the New Testament," *Modern Review*, 1883; and Delitsch, "Hillel and Jesus," *Andover Review*, Oct. and Nov., 1884.

² For a description of the Essenes, see Schürer, *The Jewish People*, vol. ii. § 30.

secret in character, to which persons entered by baptism, and in which they practised great simplicity and austerity of manners. The Essenes rejected private property, oaths, the temple-sacrifice, and marriage; they shunned all defilements, and carried the practice of purification to great extremes; they preached non-resistance; and they put great emphasis upon the humanities. Now, some of these characteristics are similar to those of the gospel; and yet in many particulars Jesus' life and teaching directly contradicted the Essenic regulations. Our conclusion, then, is that Jesus was in no sense an Essene, though that religious movement shows the presence at that time of reformatory efforts in the general direction of Christianity, and he was undoubtedly indirectly influenced by it.¹

The assertion that Jesus studied in Egypt is a baseless fancy too absurd to need even a passing mention; while the theory that he was only the retailer of Buddhist wisdom is a perfectly wild and unsupported vagary.²

¹ For discussion of Jesus' relation to Essenes, see "Essenism and Christianity," Unitarian Review, vol. xi. p. 595.

² The conclusions of the soundest scholarship respecting the relation of Jesus to Buddhism have been stated by J. Estlin Carpenter, "Buddhism and the New Testament," Nineteenth Century, Dec. 1880.

Jesus was rather the native product of Israel; his garments were wet with the dews of Galilee, and his speech was full of its local coloring. And in his intensely moral, practical, and non-speculative teaching, we have nothing approaching Oriental theosophy.

Indeed, Jesus was so much the child of Judaism that he shared some of the limitations of his age: he believed with his people, in devils and demoniacal possessions; and in the interpretation of Scripture he approached the false methods of the rabbis then current. Even Toy remarks: "As an individual man, he had of necessity a definite, restricted intellectual outfit and outlook; and these could be only those of his day and generation."¹ We must therefore conceive of Jesus as directly related to the moral and intellectual climate of his time. The reverent and candid Keim concludes: "Notwithstanding all the preponderance of moral conquests and excellences, the actual facts of his moral life, like his confessions, also reveal at isolated points the existence of human limitations."²

Jesus stood on the platform of Hebrew piety, Greek humanism, and Roman civility.

¹ Toy, *Quotations in the New Testament*, p. xxviii.

² *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. vi. p. 412.

But he was something more than the platform on which he stood. These various elements were gathered up in him and fused in a personality which was indeed new, and yet it was a personality dependent like others upon its environment. Like all such great characters, Jesus was the product of humanity, crowned with originality.¹ But the relations in which he stood to the world were not different in kind from those of other men. It is often urged that Jesus must have been divine in some peculiar sense, because the elements of such a character did not exist in Judaism at that time, and because Jesus was so original that he must have been supernatural. But this claim can be even apparently established only by ignoring the higher elements of Judaism and by investing Jesus with fictitious or legendary features. Moreover, all such arguments ignore the possibilities of human nature as well as the plainest facts of history. For if great men did not naturally bring original elements into civilization, there could be no such thing as general progress. Again and again have characters arisen that appear as unrelated to their environment as Jesus to his. We would make no compari-

¹ Hausrath, *New Testament Times*, vol. ii. p. 147.

sons and suggest no equality; but it is obvious that Socrates at Athens was as unique as Jesus at Jerusalem.

Bushnell's assertion¹ that the character of Jesus forbids his possible classification with men, was not made by the immediate followers of the Nazarene; and the only way to defend it is to elevate Jesus into the region of the unhistorical. We would not attempt to bring Jesus down to the level of ordinary men; he was no *mere man*; but we do contend that the distance between him and other great prophets is no greater than that between a Socrates and the lowest savage; so that we classify him with men and bring his character within the limits of human possibility. To do otherwise violates the fundamental law of history and robs Jesus of significance as our example. For if Jesus is the perfection of our type of being, then there is infinite encouragement for us in his superior life; but if he is a mysterious God-man, then the distance between us and him places him too far off for an example. We might look and wonder, but we could not find encouragement to say, "I will try to be all that myself." And that Jesus considered

¹ Nature and the Supernatural, chap. x.

himself the product of humanity, closely related to the Judaic dispensation, is the impression which we trace throughout the first three Gospels.

Jesus placed himself in connection with the Messianic hope of his people. Now, this was a very natural thing for him to do, for the aspirations of his race were centred in that ideal, — so that Jesus must somehow take up the great theme of popular debate and give it some interpretation. To work at all, he must define his Messianic doctrine. And though we deal here with a difficult problem, as the Gospels through which we look are lenses colored with the Messianic hope as it existed in the minds of his disciples and reporters, yet our conclusion is that Jesus did in some way claim to be the realization of that Messianic ideal. And this claim involved the assertion of nothing more than human rank.

But just when or how this Messianic consciousness arose in Jesus or was proclaimed by him, it is impossible to state with any definiteness. Some have supposed that Jesus began his ministry simply as a moral teacher; and that in the course of his experiences, toward the close of his life, he came to iden-

tify himself with this Messianic hope. But the traditions are too meagre to make this conclusion certain, — while the absence of chronological order in the Gospels themselves makes it impossible to use their statements in support of any such theory; for what is there set down first may have belonged to the close of his life. The only certainty seems to be this, that Jesus gave a purely spiritual and non-political interpretation to the Messianic ideal. It seems equally clear also that he looked upon a certain kind of life like his own as the realization of that ideal. The kingdom of heaven, of which he so often spoke, is pictured as a personal life rather than as a social order, — not only a way of living, but a quality of life.

That he founded a definite Messianic society, or Christian republic, with special rites, dogmas, and tests of citizenship, is very improbable; and such intimations in the Gospels are doubtless the reflections of a later age, incorporated by the final editor into the original tradition. And when he insisted upon fellowship with himself or devotion to himself, he did not take the position of an autocrat, but simply recognized the fact that only those who attached themselves to him

personally could become thoroughly impregnated with his spirit. Therefore, after making due allowance for the Messianic coloring of the Gospels, derived from the Messianic bias of his disciples who were the reporters, the truth found seems to be contained in some such statement as this: Jesus, realizing the power of personal influence, appreciating the necessity to his movement of a personal centre, feeling the magnitude of his own powers, and interpreting the Messianic ideal as a quality of individual life, did claim to be its fulfilment; by which he meant simply that its realization was found in his kind of life, and also that those who lived as he did were in the kingdom of heaven. And when Jesus demanded devotion to himself, discipleship, as the way to that kingdom of heaven, he acted in no exclusive or domineering spirit, and had reference to no supernatural relations between himself and his followers.

Our general conclusion, then, is that Jesus was the product of humanity, affiliated by historic relations to his people, and limited in many respects by the mental horizon of his time; and yet that he possessed a genuine originality, which he nowhere better illustrated than by teaching that the Messianic hope

must be realized through a life like his own ; that the kingdom of heaven is a spirit and method of life.¹

That Jesus possessed sublime elements and mighty powers is clear ; but how shall we describe the character of his pre-eminence or explain the source of his influence ? It explains nothing to say that he was God. That is a simple confession of ignorance. It is no explanation to say that God makes the grass grow. One does not explain the independence of America by saying that Washington was inspired. Men imagine that the assertion of Jesus' deity clears up the whole subject, but that is as irrational as the position of the old Persians, who, when they could no longer tell who wrote the Avesta, asserted that God wrote it. Some say that the pre-eminence of Jesus lay in what he did, the work that he wrought. But Jesus was not an organizer, like Cæsar or Muhammed. He founded no system. He drilled no emissaries. He elaborated no machinery. His kingdom of heaven had no frame-work. His movement was so destitute of all organization that the wonder has been that it ever lived. Even the re-

¹ Hausrath, *New Testament Times*, vol. ii. pp. 142-156.
Keim, *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. iii. pp. 48-92.

markable cures which he may have performed would not have given him much pre-eminence in an age so credulous and so expectant of wonders; and even such marvels are not the source of moral influence, which is the phenomenon to be explained.

Others describe his work as the introduction of a new economy into the universe, the presentation of his blood as a sedative to God's anger, and as a charm to man's nature. He effected, they say, a supernatural reconciliation between God and man. But this is a far-fetched, cumbersome, materialistic scheme, which presents more difficulties than it solves. The operations of that new economy are not manifest in human affairs. The onward ways of Providence are in the same stately courses of law as before. The cross is no hiatus in nature between old and new. No new faculty is discoverable in human nature as the consequent of his mission. This scheme of blood atonement was not taught by Jesus; it is unverified by experience, while it reflects no credit upon God, and confers no honor upon man.

Others say that the secret of Jesus' power lay in his message; he taught a new doctrine. We grant the sublimity of his teachings; but

nearly all his beautiful utterances had already been given to the world. They were not obeyed, yet they were common property. His sayings, therefore, do not describe his pre-eminence. Sayings are outward, fragmentary, static, and can never serve even as an exact index to the inner life. As John Morley says: "A man is always so much more than his words, as we feel every day of our lives; what he says has its momentum indefinitely multiplied, or reduced to nullity, by the impression that the hearer, for good reasons or bad, happens to have formed of the spirit and moral size of the speaker."¹ There is an ideal of life, an aspiration of soul, a fragrance of sanctity, which no words can record. There are riches of character for which no tongue has a language. Jesus' sayings do not explain his power. We must look behind the message to the soul which created it.

The excellence of his personality is our key to the mystery. The power of Jesus was not in what he *said*, but in what he *was*. It was his rich *personality*. There is a personal power, independent of deed or word, which is an indescribable but efficient force. It is the attraction which inheres in character, as

¹ Voltaire, p. 6.

magnetism inheres in a loadstone. Moral greatness diffuses an exhilarating atmosphere. It is the power of personality that moves and transforms the world. It is the manhood working in the deed and speaking in the word that makes them significant. A great character sheds abroad an influence as cheering, as quickening, and as luminous as sunlight. It is not what Jesus organized, not what he suffered, not what he said, — we must look in the direction of his personality for an explanation of his influence. It was the sweet majesty of his manhood that moved the people. Dr. Hedge thus defines the importance of personality: "It depends not so much on the clearness and fulness of the revelation as on the personality with which it is associated, whether or not the revelation shall become an historic dispensation. The moral intuitions of Plato far transcended those of Muhammed, but the moral force, the momentum of personality, the quality of soul in Muhammed exceeded the genius of Plato. Adopted by providence, the slender thought and vast soul of the Arab have rallied around them the fifth part of the human race, whilst the fuller revelation of the Greek could only modify Gentile and Christian theology with

its intellectual leaven.”¹ Men say that the Gospels do not explain the power of Jesus over men. Of course they do not; they simply record the fact.

It was not because he uttered the Golden Rule that Jesus taught “as one having authority,” but because he himself was a Golden Rule incarnate. It was not because he spake the Beatitudes that the people heard him gladly, but because his personality was a Beatitude. It was not because he taught in parables that they loved him, but because his manhood touched them with inspiration. In Jesus people found and felt a deep, tender piety manifested as a free spirit of life. There stood a spotless purity, conscious of God as Father, and there yearned a boundless humanity conscious of kinship with all men. There indeed was absolute piety and absolute unselfishness, and in that fact lay the secret of his power. It may well be doubted whether Jesus told the Samaritan woman anything new. It was a common saying “that God is a spirit and must be worshipped in spirit;” but what thrilled her was his personality; she

¹ *Ways of the Spirit*, p. 142. See also, Corson, “The Idea of Personality,” in *The Browning Society Papers*, part iii.

stood in a new presence. Imagine the inspiration that would flow from a Channing as he talked to a rough country lad. She, in like manner, felt Jesus' richness of life, the new strange sweetness of voice, the calm spiritual eye; no wonder she felt that she had found the Christ.

Thus Jesus established by the power of his personality a new order of manhood. And if printing began an era in literature, and the application of steam an era in commerce, how much more shall we say that Jesus began an era in the spiritual life of humanity. He introduced a new type of moral architecture. He presented a character adorned with new graces and endowed with new powers. His life was superior to the visions which had filled the mind of the prophet or the philosopher, and yet its superiority was evident and welcome to the common people even as the art of the Renaissance was more highly appreciated by the masses than that of the Dark Ages. His personality was a masterpiece of moral genius, and as truly revolutionized religion as the steam-engine has the world's commerce. Martineau states this truth in these words: "The power of Christ's religion is not in his precepts, but in his per-

son; not in the memory of his maxims, but in the image of himself.”¹

The Greeks had an order of manhood, which was the worship of Beauty, — a glorious estate in its best manifestation, but deficient on the side of pity and reverence. The Romans had an order of manhood, which was the worship of Power, — victorious in practical affairs, but destitute of capacity to satisfy the heart and organize philanthropy. The Jews had an order of manhood, which was conformity to Holiness, — a strict ideal which, however, often dropped to mechanical formalism from lack of inward power. But in the personality of Jesus was presented a new order of manhood, — the growth of the soul into Beauty, Power, and Holiness, — the all-sufficiency of Inner-Life, interpreted as love to God and love to man.

¹ Liverpool Lectures, lec. v. p. 4.

THE GLAD TIDINGS.

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THE GLAD TIDINGS.

WE encounter several difficulties in attempting to describe the teachings of Jesus. In the first place, Jesus wrote nothing himself; we have no original statements of his thoughts as he would have set them down himself. We have nothing but second-hand reports of his teaching; and even the most careful narratives are unsatisfactory. It would be much harder to describe the central ideas of Channing and Emerson if we had none of their writings; and in the case of Jesus, who spoke in a distant past, under conditions and amidst forms of thought hard to reproduce by the imagination, the difficulty is made very much greater.

Again, we do not have the full or systematic report of an immediate disciple. The disciples preached Jesus, and the oral reports of their preaching travelled in the memory of the Church for one or two generations before they were written out in that form in which we possess them. The Gospels themselves

show us that the disciples often misunderstood Jesus, because they were so much inferior to him; therefore any report which they could have made would be more or less colored by their own thoughts. And Jesus' sayings, as thus reported, during their travel as oral tradition, passed through several transforming or refracting media. For we must bear in mind that those were times of intense excitement, when the person of Jesus was the subject of bitter strife and sharp controversy. And as light is bent from its course by the humidity of the atmosphere, so Jesus' thought would in certain ways be deflected and obscured by any impurities in the mental atmosphere of primitive Christianity. And such refracting media did then exist, as the early Church was not without its prejudices and superstitions.

Three such refracting elements or deflecting tendencies may be mentioned. The Messianic hope created an idealization of Jesus in the direction of certain dominant expectations. There was a popular notion that the Messiah would do and say certain things; and as Jesus came into relation with this Messianic hope, men naturally saw him through this refracting medium of their expectations,

and so read into his words their own Messianic notions. And this Messianic coloring naturally became stronger, the longer the oral tradition travelled through the Messianic medium. In this way some of Jesus' sayings were reshaped, and some of his parables came to be misapplied.

A case in point is the parable of the Good King, or the Sheep and Goats. If we look simply at the body of the parable¹ as it stands in our record, it is plain enough that Jesus told the story to enforce the necessity of unselfish, loving service as the essence of religion. But the Messianic tendency gave it a brief introduction which makes it apply to the final judgment at Jesus' second coming: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Now this addition was so unskilfully made that there is no difficulty in separating it from the original. The violent transition from "Son of man" to "Then shall the king say unto them,"—from the standpoint of

¹ Matthew xxv. 34-45.

final judgment to the standpoint of a simple narrative of human affairs, — shows clearly how Jesus' parable of duty was changed by tradition into an apocalyptic vision.

Again, there was in the primitive Church an ascetic tendency, a violent hatred of riches ; an ideal of life championed by a party afterwards known as the Ebionites. They picked up whatever Jesus said against riches ; and by neglecting his deeper thought, by dropping modifying phrases, and by over-emphasis of particular sayings, they reshaped his teaching and made of it in many respects a new gospel. They were able to understand only according to their capacity ; they caught at what agreed with their own ideas, and by laying hold of certain phrases exclusively, they wandered far from the true doctrines of Jesus. An illustration of this tendency is found in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, where one man is put in heaven simply because he was poor, while another is sent to hell chiefly because he was rich. This does not sound like Jesus, who insisted so often upon heart-life rather than upon the mere circumstances of one's career. Jesus often spoke against the corrupting influence of riches, the worship of Mammon, but there is nothing in

this story, as it now stands, of that spiritual discernment combined with a large common-sense, which characterizes the parables as a rule. The heartlessness and crude sense of justice contained in the words put into Abraham's mouth, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented,"¹ represent a much lower plane than that occupied by Jesus. And the concluding words, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead,"² give evidence of a late date, because they are an attempt to explain why the Jews did not believe in the Risen One. Evidently, then, the Ebionitic tendency first reshaped the body of the parable, and later the anti-Jewish tendency added an application.³

There are many other evidences of the working of the same tendency. In Luke, the Beatitude as given by Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"⁴ is shortened to "Blessed be ye poor."⁵ Here the Ebionitic

¹ Luke xvi. 25.

² Luke xvi. 31.

³ Davidson, Introduction to the New Testament, vol. 1, p. 470.

⁴ Matthew v. 3.

⁵ Luke vi. 20.

tendency cut off the phrase "in spirit," and thus narrowed the scope and obscured the meaning of Jesus' message. We are forced to this conclusion because it is rational to attribute the best to Jesus, and because we know that just this crude spirit was at work among his followers, who would naturally make just this mistake.

Still again: there was a violent contest between Paul and the party of James, respecting the Levitical law and the general scope of the new religion. Paul insisted that the law was abolished in Christ, so he gave the gospel a catholic interpretation; while James clung to the Levitical law and claimed that Gentiles must become Jews before they could be Christians. This contest raged while the teachings of Jesus were still carried as oral tradition; and those who first wrote out the gospel-traditions were somewhat controlled by these opposing views. And this fact accounts for many of the discrepancies in our Gospels. The teaching of Jesus, after having been passed through a narrow mind like that of James, would wear a different aspect than when passed through a catholic mind like that of Paul. And such differences separate Matthew and Luke, as has been pointed

out in the chapter on the Growth of the Gospels.

As we listen, then, we hear not only Jesus' voice, but also mingling with it various apostolic echoes. The reporters, in giving their best report, reported somewhat of their own thought with that of their Master. And these personal tendencies of the reporters had a wider scope, not only from the fact that Jesus' teaching was so long carried in oral tradition, but also because Jesus' large use of figurative and paradoxical language made such transformations easy. It is only by making allowance for such refractions of Jesus' teaching, as it passed through the minds of his reporters, that we can do justice to him or hope to understand him.

To state the facts in a different shape: We know that certain notions and tendencies possessed the minds of Jesus' disciples, — a materialistic Messianic expectation, a prejudice against riches, an acrimonious controversy respecting the Levitical law. Any reports made by such men under these conditions, even with the most honest intentions, would be distorted or colored in the direction of such personal limitations. Therefore it is rational to claim for Jesus the sublimer ideas

of the Gospels, while we attribute to his disciples those cruder notions which are in line with those personal tendencies of his reporters, and which would inevitably show themselves in such reports. We must insist upon Jesus' superiority and consistency; and when, at the close of a paragraph full of remarkable spirituality, we come across some crude Messianic notion which contradicts the preceding spirituality, and which we know was common in his day in that section of society where his disciples moved; or when, in the midst of a forcible plea for Inner Life as the real kingdom of heaven, we come across some over-emphasis of mere outward poverty just in the line of that Ebionism of some of his followers, — in such cases we unhesitatingly say that in the latter parts we have the mind of his disciples rather than his own.

This is a recognized principle of historical and literary criticism; and unless we make such allowances we are obliged to lower our estimate of Jesus, or resort to fanciful and forced expedients to do away with these discrepancies. And the errors into which interpreters of the Gospel have fallen are largely due to a neglect of this principle. The only

way to make an approximately clear or true delineation of Jesus' thought is to attribute some of these cruder notions to that refraction of the oral tradition, as it passed through the disciples' minds and took on some of their own imperfect opinions.

We do not insist upon this elimination in order to save the perfection of Jesus, but because the facts warrant it and the canons of criticism demand it. Indeed, we would not dogmatically affirm Jesus' absolute freedom from intellectual or even moral error. He seems to have accepted the fictitious demonology of his countrymen; he pictured a terrible hell, though he did not prolong emphasis upon eternal punishment, after the manner of a John Calvin, Jeremy Taylor, or Jonathan Edwards. His wholesale denunciations of the Pharisees as a class seem upon investigation to have been hardly deserved. Even these limitations are now admitted by such conservative critics as Meyer, Weiss, and Hausrath. But what we do insist upon is this: that Jesus be interpreted by the best in the record, and that we eliminate those discordant elements in a line with the well-known prejudices and errors of his disciples and reporters.

Moreover, in studying the Gospels we must keep in view Jesus' poetic temperament, and his love of paradox. What Jesus said respecting almsgiving, non-resistance, and indifference to thrift, must be understood according to the spirit in which he spoke. They are not universal rules of life, and were not so presented by Jesus. But in all these sayings there is a nucleus of inner meaning, which is sacred and enduring truth. Among uncharitable, quarrelsome, and worldly people it was well to lay stress upon benevolence, forbearance, and care for something besides Mammon; and these graces are eternally obligatory and beautiful; but the particular form under which Jesus pictured them, the shell of words in which he enclosed them,—giving your cloak to him who asks your coat, turning the other cheek also to be smitten, and taking no thought of the morrow, — these are orientalisms of language in which Jesus delighted, and we must listen to him in the oriental spirit. To apply them literally is really to miss his thought and degrade him as a teacher. They are only highly colored pictures of the necessity of love, forbearance, and spirituality. Jesus had too much practical insight to fall into arid fanaticism, and these fragmentary sayings

in condemnation of the worldly spirit must be read in the light of his fundamental thought respecting the kingdom of heaven.¹

Having thus prepared ourselves to put aside some of the cruder features of the record as a sediment deposited from the minds of his reporters, let us try to lay hold of Jesus' central thought. There was a phrase then current around which patriotic hopes and wild fancies, the sober yearnings of the cultivated, the spiritual thought of a Hillel, the narrow notions of the Levite, all circled, — "the kingdom of heaven;" and just as a Channing and an Emerson had to say something about that theme uppermost in their day, — abolition, — so had Jesus in his teachings to place himself in relation with the Messianic hope which occupied the popular mind. He had to take up this phrase, "kingdom of heaven," and give it some interpretation. Here we find, then, both his starting-point and his point of departure from the popular doctrines of his day. And if we carefully study his interpretation of this phrase we shall discover not only what was central, but what was superior, in his teaching or gospel.

¹ Greg, Creed of Christendom, introduction to fifth edition.

There already existed three interpretations of this phrase: the Levitical, which viewed the Messianic time as a spiritual expansion of Israel as a people, to be brought about by that moral and ritual purity which would issue from perfect obedience to the Mosaic law; the political, which looked forward to a revolution, the overthrow of Rome, the exaltation of Jerusalem through the enthronement there of a mighty king; the ascetic, which denounced riches because they are so closely associated with vice, and which set forth poverty as the way to the kingdom,—a harsh and gloomy view of life, which found expression in John's preaching of repentance in the wilderness.

Though dissimilar, yet all these views had various elements in common, which mark the limitation of the Judaism of that day, and which by contrast enable us to comprehend the originality of Jesus and the power of his gospel. They all represented the kingdom of heaven as something to be waited for, and therefore as beyond the reach of individual effort; they all laid much stress upon certain externals, but varying from gross to refined materialism; they all fostered the pride of race, and denied universal humanity by claiming pre-eminence for Israel.

Now Jesus, in taking up the phrase, "kingdom of heaven," put himself in sympathetic relation with the popular hope; yet he accepted none of the views then current. He severely rebuked the political interpretation. He said, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's."¹ He said also, according to another report, "My kingdom is not of this world."² The scope of his sympathies was universal humanity. He looked to man as a man, and loved him as a brother, without any regard to his relations of race. To rebuke the pride of his countrymen he told the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus also rebuked the materialistic expectations of external glory: "The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show."³ He gave his benediction to the meek rather than to the contentious; he called men to service rather than to conquest; his attitude was one of humility rather than of self-assertion; he praised the peace-maker rather than the warrior. His gospel abounds with the emphases of duty rather than of personal rights; he sought to change the disposition of the heart rather than the political relations of his peo-

¹ Matt. xxii. 21.² John xviii. 36.³ Luke xvii. 20.

ple. He saw that the reorganization of society must flow from the perfection of the individual.

Jesus was too catholic and too practical to accept the ascetic interpretation. While his kingdom was not of this world politically, yet it was not a kingdom of other-worldliness. Jesus, moreover, was no recluse, but mingled with men and enjoyed life in pure ways. He even went so far that the ascetic party called him a "wine-bibber." He insisted upon fullness and richness of Inner Life, the control of the animal by the rational, rather than upon crucifixion of the flesh. His purpose was to train men to live purely in the world rather than to shun and renounce the world. He saw the danger of riches; but he placed his emphasis on inward power rather than on outward poverty. He honored John the Baptist; but he broadened and softened the ideal of life presented by that gloomy prophet. Jesus insisted upon repentance, but in another tone and for a higher object; that is, as the beginning of personal perfection, not as merely the preparation for the Messianic kingdom as an outward dispensation. He even said that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John; by which he meant

that any one who accepted his own interpretation of the kingdom of heaven, and lived by it, was greater than John, who clung to the notion of an external Messianic kingdom.

Jesus agreed with the more spiritual-minded of the Levitical party in so far as they regarded the Messianic time as a reign of righteousness,—as the spiritual ministry of the people Israel, rather than as the political exaltation of Jerusalem. But in all other respects, his departures from their ideal and method were profound and radical. He differed from them respecting the source and quality of righteousness.¹ Both said that purity of heart is the all-essential; but even to the best Pharisees righteousness was the product of studied obedience to a code, while to Jesus righteousness was the product of a free and spontaneous love. They insisted upon ritual-purity as the means to heart-purity; he conceived of heart-purity as a native spiritual growth. Such words as forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and tenderness belonged to the vocabulary of both;² but the Pharisees looked

¹ See Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, pp. 499-513. Also, Hausrath, *New Testament Times*, vol. ii. pp. 142-156.

² See Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, pp. 25-88. Also, Deutsch, *Literary Remains: The Talmud*.

upon the graces thus named as the results of obedience to Mosaism, while Jesus looked upon them as the results of education, conceived as a process of divine development. *They* said, Obey the law in order to gain this estate; *he* said, Reach this estate by growth as a man. The Pharisees appealed to the letter of the law, Jesus to the conscience of the individual. They insisted that the Gentile must become a Jew to enter the kingdom; he, that the Gentile enters by right of what he is as a man.

The Pharisees taught that the kingdom of heaven must be waited for, and that it could be entered only by the people as a whole in their corporate capacity. Jesus taught — and herein especially lay his originality and superiority — that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and accessible to the individual. And in this idea beyond all else we find the essential greatness and immense power of the gospel. That responsibility which according to the popular theory rested upon Israel as a people, Jesus brought home to the individual conscience in such a way as to make each man feel that he himself stood face to face with God; that Messianic glory which was expected as a national dispensation, which the

individual could possess only as it came to the State as a whole and descended thence to him, Jesus set before each one as a possession within the reach of his own will; and that providence of God which was conceived as directed toward the family of Abraham in its entirety, Jesus focused upon each soul, making the individual feel that the fatherhood of God meant a particular tenderness and watch-care for himself.

Thus Jesus completely revolutionized the conception of the method of salvation. He taught that man ascends, not because he is forced upward by the momentum of his community, but because he himself chooses to ascend; that the Messianic glory, instead of being a public blessing first, which then descends to the individual, is first the acquisition of individual hearts and so passes from a private grace to a general emancipation. This was a message of joy and power because it placed the key of heaven in the hands of each individual.¹

Jesus' central thought, then, was this: The kingdom of heaven is Inner Life, the perfection of man as a spiritual being, which comes from putting the soul above the flesh, the ra-

¹ Baur, *Church History*, vol. i. p. 35.

tional above the animal, our eternal good above momentary gratification. All of which Jesus pictured in that paradoxical saying, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."¹ Or in other words we may say: The kingdom of heaven is not a corporate institution, but a quality of life founded in the moral and religious nature of the soul; not an outward realm to be entered by fictitious duties and rites, but a soul-possession, the heritage of children and the childlike; not a general dispensation that must be waited for, but a moral disposition into which the individual may grow at once. Jesus, then, believed in an ethical kingdom that is already here, which the individual can possess by an act of his own will.

Consider his clear and pointed language: Say not, Lo here, or lo there, as though it were an external dispensation coming from above, or a political order to be constructed; but, Behold, the kingdom of heaven is within you, — a certain quality of individual life. He locates it within the heart: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He likens it to a childlike trust:

¹ John xii. 25.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God." He lays emphasis upon love as the creative and sovereign power of that kingdom: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."¹ He calls man to self-sacrifice, to that bearing of burdens for others which Paul named the "law of Christ,"² to that joyous yielding up of one's will to the good of humanity which is especially the Christian spirit: "If any man will come after me, let him renounce himself, and take up *his* cross daily, and follow me."³ To the sensualist he said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."⁴ To the earnest young Jew who had never learned to live for others he said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, and follow me."⁵ To the selfish who seek applause he said, "Whoso-

¹ Matthew v. 44, 45.

² Galatians vi. 2.

³ Luke ix. 23.

⁴ Matthew v. 28.

⁵ Matthew xix. 21.

ever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”¹ To the political enthusiast Jesus said, The kingdom of heaven is not a temporal government, but moral power within the heart. To the scribe, The kingdom of heaven is not a doctrine built up from texts, but a humane service flowing from sympathy: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”² To the Levite: The kingdom of heaven is not a dispensation to be brought in by Levitical purity, but a spiritual possession into which the individual soul must grow: “These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”³ To the Pharisee: The kingdom of heaven is not such righteousness as yours, concerned about trifles and intent on rewards, but a righteousness springing from love and spending itself in enthusiasm for humanity: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and fidelity: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”⁴

¹ Matthew xx. 27.

³ Matthew xv. 20.

² Matthew vii. 12.

⁴ Matthew xxiii. 23.

In brief, Jesus interpreted this phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," as a spiritual estate of the individual soul, which is possible to man as the child of God, which belongs to man by virtue of his humanity, and which he can enter at once by the act of his own will. It is a quality of life, a motive power, a wealth of soul; in short, all those spiritual elements which make an exalted personality, the outward expression of which we call character. It is not merely something which belongs to man because of his race, but that which comes from his perfected humanity; not something to be won by Levitical forms, but a life which springs from growth or education of the soul; not a share in some political glory arising from revolution, but a kind of life which man is able to possess by his own choice. Therefore all those who love God and man, who are pure, tender, and earnest, who are trying to make the most of themselves and to do the best for humanity, — all these are in and do possess the very kingdom of heaven. Jesus' doctrine, then, his description of the kingdom of heaven, was in line with the great thought of the Hebrew prophets, whose writings he studied and whose spirit he cherished; but his gospel was a

fuller, riper, and clearer exposition of their thought, adapted to the conditions before him, presented through fresh and powerful illustrations, and exhibited and enforced by his own exalted personality.

Now, to comprehend the greatness of this doctrine as it lay in Jesus' mind, and to appreciate the wonderful grasp and clearness of his thought, we must study his detailed application of it to the problem of practical life. Jesus put emphasis on repentance as the necessary preparation of each man for the kingdom of heaven, viewed as an estate of moral excellence. His position was, not that all are great sinners, nor that all are equally sinful, but that every man must feel the shame of sin and turn from whatever evil way he may have been travelling. The initial element of the kingdom of heaven is this earnest desire to change one's life for the better, — a condition of the heart which comprehends both the consciousness of sin and the yearning for holiness. No man can begin the divine life except in that serious recognition on the one hand of the enormity of sin, and on the other hand of the excellence of unattained virtue. So Jesus demanded that every man must turn from whatever evil there

is in him, and go up higher. There must first be "a life-giving change of the *inner man*." His language was, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,"¹ — the statement of a universal law; but the inference that this repentance can only occur in this life is an irrational and unwarranted assumption of Orthodox theology. Thus, in Jesus' doctrine of repentance there is a direct and searching appeal to the conscience, to the divine within the human, which makes the gospel the power of God unto salvation.

Beginning in the depths of our moral nature, in genuine sorrow for sin and earnest yearning for holiness, — repentance, — the kingdom of heaven unfolds by the method of growth, illustrated by the leaven which leavens the whole lump; by the seed which yields a hundred fold; by the talents which double at interest; and by the plant, where first we have the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Its method of development is a spiritual process as natural as organic growth, — the unfolding of inherent possibilities.

The supreme spirit of this kingdom of heaven, the motive power by which it un-

¹ Luke xiii. 3.

folds, is love. Its vital and organic impulse is that affection for God as Father which makes worship simple, filial, and spiritual; and that devotion to the human which despairs of no soul and serves all souls, — that spiritualized humanity which forgives enemies, creates boundless sympathy, and returns good for evil; and this creative principle of the divine life, love, Jesus set forth in forms of imperishable beauty and undying power in those great parables, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal, the Good King.

And the quality of this Inner Life, thus rooted in repentance and built up through love, is purity, — a purity not of the body but of the soul; a purity not simply assumed, but regnant at the very centre of being. Jesus taught with marvellous wealth of illustration and with convincing earnestness that the heart itself, the realm of motive and the spring of action, must be pure. Conduct radiates from within; purity there, and then there will be purity everywhere. Out of the heart the mouth speaks; man is defiled not by his outward conditions, but by his inward disposition. At the innermost centre of life there must be built up a nucleus of pure sentiment, and then every look will be chaste

and every word undefiled. Moreover, in such purity of heart God will be found.

Repentance, then, is the preparation, growth the method, love the motive, and purity the quality of that Inner Life which constitutes the kingdom of heaven. Here is a doctrine without any limitations of race or time, which applies to man as man, — a doctrine which begins with the soul itself and declares the simple truth respecting man's moral nature; a doctrine full of gladness, power, and emancipation, because it goes home to the conscience and finds lodgment there as a word of life. Jesus did not, indeed, create the moral law, any more than Aristotle the principles of logic; but he gave to man's moral nature an original interpretation, and he made a plea for spiritual manhood which has authority for all time to come.

In this doctrine shines forth clearly the greatness and originality of Jesus. He took a popular phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," then associated with political fancies and Levitical absurdities, and so interpreted it as to make it the authoritative and perennially attractive description of essential religion. By it he carries each man down to the primal truth of his own soul and to the original

source of his conduct; while he lays bare the beginning, method, spirit, and quality of that life in which he must find the true glory and eternal joy of his being. By teaching that the kingdom of heaven is the perfection of man as spiritual and rational being, — that is, as child of God, — and by applying this thought to the problem of practical affairs, Jesus made this phrase a luminous and forcible definition of the true method of life. He loaded it with the essential truth respecting man's moral nature; and his gospel is imperishable because based upon the constitution of the soul.

From this point of view, — that the kingdom of heaven is the perfection of man as spirit, — we can clearly see Jesus' doctrine of God, of man, of salvation. God is the Infinite Father who loves man as his child; eternal compassion is poured upon the world; eternal tenderness watches over the turmoil of human life. As love is the deepest and divinest element in man, it is therefore the chief bond of union between human and divine; and back of this derived human love there must be at its source in God an Infinite Love. This conclusion may not satisfy the logician, but it is the supremest effort of the

religious consciousness. Jesus took the divinest that he found in his own heart and carried it up to God.

In view of this interpretation of God as love, which arose from his own consciousness of the nearness and intimacy of the Father, it follows that every soul has immediate access to God; which does away with all schemes of mediation, such as sacrificial atonement or Levitical propitiation. It follows that all souls belong equally to God by right of sonship, which means human equality; and it follows also that though God demands obedience and purity of man, yet God is a co-worker with man for his good, and only asks of man the best that he can do, while he simply demands of the utmost sinner genuine repentance. In Jesus' doctrine of man we have pre-eminently a practical view of human nature. He took the facts of life as he found them and entered into no speculation respecting the origin of evil. He saw good men and also evil men; but none so good as they ought to be; hence all ought to repent, and live a better life. Jesus saw no lost human beings and he never pictured human nature as totally depraved. He dealt with particular sinners as persons of dwarfed humanity, as the mor-

ally diseased, who had allowed the carnal to overcome the spiritual; but who even in their degradation possessed an indestructible nucleus of uncorrupted spirituality, which ought to be cultivated and which might be made supreme. Jesus laid great stress upon the divine possibility of the soul; however apparently dead, there was deep down in it some spark of life; and this vital element must be kindled into a flame filling the whole being.

And in all his ministry among sinners, he strove to reach this hidden spark of humanity and to develop it into the ruling motive of life; as the physician takes the vitality which his patient possesses and from it builds up normal conditions and healthy tissues. It was his penetrating insight in detecting this remnant of nobility and his method of tenderness in fostering it, that made him so successful in lifting sinners to a new life, as in the case of Mary, Zaccheus, and others. And while Jesus recognized the weakness and waywardness of human nature, he fully appreciated the sanctity of man as man, and regarded all men as gifted with imperishable capacities for a divine life and an unending progress.

From this we pass directly to Jesus' doctrine

of salvation. He planted himself squarely upon the realities of life: Men live in sin; yet they have capacity for holiness. All have an inner centre of spiritual vitality; then let men depart from sin by obeying and cultivating whatever divine element remains in their nature. And the only method by which we can help the sinner is to lay hold of that nucleus of moral power and make it the motive and law of his life. The imperative duty of every man is to live a divine life, — to live as a child of God by realizing his implanted possibilities as a spiritual being. The way of salvation, as already described, begins in repentance, proceeds by growth, broadens into love, and ends in purity of heart; and all this is itself the kingdom of heaven.

The commanding call of Jesus to man was neither to believe in a dogma, to obey a ritual, nor to live as an ascetic, but to serve his neighbor in love. If any are sick, if any are sad, if any are sinful, be to them a friend; and by enlarging their Inner Life, create the kingdom of heaven. Jesus saved sinners — lifted them above their sinful habits — by laying hold of the best within them, and developing that best element through hope, sympathy, and personal influence, until he made it the

controlling motive of their life. Jesus did not settle for man's sins and shield him from punishment; but he lifted him above the sinful disposition by making the better nature supreme. And we must follow the same method. Whatever tends toward increase of Inner Life, whatever enables man to realize his spiritual possibilities, belongs to the method of salvation. The power and simplicity of Jesus' gospel are expressed in this declaration: Depart from evil by cultivating the life of the soul; by realizing the possibilities of your humanity. And man is saved in proportion to the completeness of his Inner Life, which is his divine life; which is also his life in God.

Now, we see that Jesus was not a theologian attempting to define God, nor a mere moralist describing the moral law as an outward rule of conduct, but a prophet of the Spirit, hallowing the associations of the Divine Name, and showing men how to find God in their own souls and how to come into immediate relations with him as a Father. Jesus was also a prophet of the soul, picturing in the phrase "kingdom of heaven" an ideal and method of life which shows man how to rise above the animal and live his best

self; and which, by setting up in the spiritual nucleus of his being processes of growth, does carry the development of his true humanity to completion. Thus, the gospel of Jesus restores man to the consciousness of his moral possibilities as a child of God, and through that consciousness enables man to begin a new life.

It is easy to see why these teachings were Glad Tidings. They made every man his own master, so that his entrance into the kingdom of heaven depended solely upon his own act. He need not wait for a political revolution or for the exaltation of Israel as a people; he need not depend upon privilege of race or the favor of priests; he need not be held back by Levitical uncleanness or by the condemnation of the synagogue. Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven is a moral estate, which belongs to man by right of his humanity; that he must lay hold of it as an individual; and that its possession depends solely upon his own choice. This doctrine cut the bonds of pride and prejudice and caste, and swept away the vexations of ritual and the subtleties of dogma, while it set man upon his feet as the child of God, conscious of divine possibilities, free to shape his own

destiny, and privileged to enter the kingdom of heaven at once.

This was a word of emancipation which scattered gloom by bringing light and joy. Jesus' teachings were also Glad Tidings, not only because they restored spiritual freedom to man and made him conscious of his humanity, but because they presented the simple humanities as the way of salvation. Jesus made a higher but a less vexatious demand upon man. When he called to men engaged in a painful obedience to scores of ritual precepts and showed them that heart-life and practical goodness, reverence, and sympathy, are sufficient, he lifted a great bondage and planted a mighty joy.

But even more than this: By directly addressing their hearts with words of hope and tenderness, by pressing home stories illustrative of pity and compassion, and by touching with inspiration the dormant elements of their better nature, Jesus created sympathy and started the flow of aspiration. And such spiritual growth is infinite gladness. We are never so happy as when the heart is welling up with pure and noble sentiments. As Jesus spoke, men saw themselves in a new light, — the Father's benediction lay all about; the

kingdom of heaven was at hand to be possessed at will by right of their humanity; the way of salvation stretched out before them through loving reverence and humane service and purity of heart; and as they listened to all this, and saw all this, they felt the new life within. That was joy indeed.

And how vast the difference between these Glad Tidings and the church creeds! How completely theologians have failed to understand and interpret Jesus correctly, by trying to formulate his teachings into a cold and formal body of divinity, which indeed has no divinity. Jesus made men feel God's presence; the creeds attempt to define his person. Jesus pictured God as brooding love in immediate contact with the soul; the creeds insist that God is angry and demands propitiation. Jesus makes his starting-point the divine possibility of man; the creeds begin with total depravity. Jesus appealed to man's conscience in order to inspire him to put away the shame of sin, and accept the kingdom of heaven as Inner Life; the creeds magnify the fear of hell-fire to compel belief, even against reason. Jesus put his emphasis on repentance as man's necessity and God's requirement; the creeds lay stress on vicarious

satisfaction. Jesus called the doer blessed; the creeds have blessed the believer. Jesus pictured the method of salvation as growth of soul,—making the most of human nature; the creeds describe a miraculous conversion,—the acceptance of another nature. Jesus placed goodness supreme; the creeds make doctrine essential. Jesus taught the necessity of a higher righteousness, springing from love and consisting in the perfection of human nature; the creeds teach that man's sins must be covered by imputed righteousness. Jesus' gospel is full of parables illustrative of loving kindness as God's attitude to man and as man's duty to his neighbor; the creeds are full of abstruse notions respecting election, baptism, and justification. Let us put aside these monstrous misrepresentations of Jesus' teaching, and refresh ourselves with his words, which are still Glad Tidings.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO-DAY.

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THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO-DAY.

MANY forms of thought with which Jesus was once associated have forever passed away. With their disappearance many notions about Jesus, which in their day were valuable instruments of human culture, have become obsolete. And as we must do the work of to-day with the intellectual machinery of to-day, it follows that the ministry of Jesus must take its place in harmony with that scientific truth and that social method which are now supreme in the world of thought and action. Jesus must be viewed in connection with all the new truth which has been discovered respecting nature, humanity, and man; and the help derived from him must flow through those educational forms by which it is found that the life of the race unfolds.

The Messianic ideal of the apostolic age, with all its attendant fancies, has utterly vanished away never to return; and its Apocalyptic visions of glories and woes form no part of

our anticipations. We are not watching for the descent of any such New Jerusalem; and therefore that apostolic faith which pictured Jesus as coming in the clouds of heaven to put the sword of vengeance to Gog and Magog and to gather the faithful within the gates of pearl, has no meaning to us either as literal or poetical prediction. That throne and those ministering angels have disappeared from the circle of our ardent hopes and ruling fancies. Jesus no longer stands in the midst of any such cosmic panorama. That group of intense but fantastic expectations has as completely passed away as Zeus from Olympus, or Druid rites from English forests; and Jesus cannot be to us all that he was to the Christians of the first century, though he may have for us in many respects a more valuable ministry. They found in him a Messiah, at whose word, as they thought, the powers of evil would be swept from the face of the earth, which, thus cleansed, he would give to the righteous as a blissful heritage. But to us to-day he can have no such Messianic ministry, because we have no such ideal with which to associate him. Our hopes have another form, and our aspirations another direction.

Later, while men were intent on that speculative philosophy of creation which had for its centre the Logos-idea, it was natural that Jesus should be viewed as that Logos or operative agent of the Eternal. A logical necessity compelled that union of gospel history and Alexandrian theosophy. By thinking of Jesus as the Logos, or Creative Word, men obtained a religious and personal centre for their philosophy; while at the same time they obtained a philosophical basis for their religion, which gave dignity to their faith and vast scope to hope and imagination. But the problem, How is the ineffable God related to the world of matter?—which they tried to solve by the Logos-idea—has no meaning for us. All our energy is turned toward the discovery of the laws of the Divine Existence as manifested in nature, and our faith affirms the immanence of God in nature rather than his separation or isolation from nature. The Logos-idea is not the working theory of any modern investigator. The discovery of organic and physical processes never suggests to biologist or chemist the presence of Jesus the Logos as a creative factor or ultimate cause. Even those very words, "Jesus the Logos," belong to the

dictionary of obsolete terms. Neither in the laboratory of the scientist nor in the study of the historian is any account now taken of this root-conception of that Christian Gnosticism which took such liberties with the Divine Nature, and which mistook for realities a host of fancies as absurd and shadowy as ever engaged the mind of man. We no longer indulge those daring and visionary speculations respecting the being of God; and what we know of the universe leaves no room for such a Logos. The mind instructed by science refuses to picture Jesus as a world-builder, and declines to associate him with any supernatural ministry whatever. Those moulds of thought are broken; for the universe presents itself to us as a cosmos, or realm of correlated forces, through which One Purpose pulses; and neither in the spectra of the farthest star nor in the most rudimentary functions of the primordial protoplasm do we find any fact which hints any such creative machinery. The Logos-idea, therefore, describes none of the discoveries yet made, and offers no aid toward a solution of problems which still confront us; and whoever continues to use it proclaims himself by that use a mystagogue unleavened by

the thought of the present age. The fashion of the hour to speak of Jesus as "the Christ," as though he were a psychical intermediary between the soul and the Eternal, is a revived Gnosticism, which strips religion of virility and exiles Jesus himself into regions of mere mistiness.

And now that the idea of natural law has swept the demoniacal from all space, and dissipated that fear of the Satanic which hung like a pall over the human spirit, it is no longer possible to think of Jesus as the conqueror of a personal devil. When men felt the air to be as thick with demons as we ever saw it full of snow-flakes, it was some comfort to believe that Jesus had endowed the cross with protective power. But these thoughts and fears have disappeared. We look out upon the world with other eyes; and in our hearts dwells a supreme confidence that nature is both clean and friendly. That redemptive ministry so long attributed to Jesus cannot now be connected with him, because the demoniacal realm from which he was supposed to rescue us is found to be a mere phantom. It has been swept away by that Baconian movement toward reality, which seeks to see things as they are.

Man indeed needs help, but not deliverance from Satanic captivity, because there is no Satan to hold him captive. Man also needs protection, but not a shield from God's wrath, for such wrath is the fiction of an ignorant fear. The help and protection that man needs are rather that educational ministry which so expands his moral and rational nature that righteousness becomes the supreme desire of his heart, while purity crowns him with peace. Thus, we must interpret Jesus' ministry, not with reference to those past forms of thought, but in connection with the truth now known and the social methods now operative. Jesus must be set in the midst of the universe viewed as a cosmos, and approached for that personal influence which human life needs and which historic order permits.

These considerations suggest the thought that accurate views of Jesus could not be expected of men in various past ages. When, for instance, we study the Christian mind during the second century, we find on the one hand an intense moral earnestness, which, working through the Church as a social organ, pledged to equality and productive of the humanities, revolutionized the ideals and

habits of men, and laid the foundations of a new civilization. But, on the other hand, we see a vast mass of dense superstitions, which made those people incapable of forming a true and rational opinion respecting Jesus' work. If we look into their writings anywhere we find almost absolute ignorance of nature, an excessive demonology, a philosophical system long since outgrown, a narrow and confused historic vision, a gross misconception of Hebrew prophecy, while their minds were incapacitated for calm judgment by the impending terrors of martyrdom. These, then, were the forms of thought with which they had to associate Jesus, and these the conditions under which they had to interpret his ministry. Now, it is evident enough that they were neither capable of fully appreciating Jesus' character, nor of interpreting his mission with accuracy. We would not adopt their opinion nor accept their belief as authoritative upon any other subject; and surely, we ought to be even much more reluctant to adopt their theory respecting so difficult a subject as the ministry of Jesus.

Suppose we go, for another illustration, into the mediæval monastery, where worked such a man as Anselm, or Aquinas. The

occupants of such monasteries, in the better days of the system, were trying to keep the lamp of civilization burning; they were also trying to bring semi-barbarians into something like social and moral order. But there dwelt that ascetic fanaticism which produced an irrational and morbid conscience, which strangely misread both life and providence, — a conscience that condemned all pleasure as a sin, that emphasized physical filth as the way to spiritual purity, and that pictured God as delighting in man's pains and agonies. This morbid sense of sin as a debt, and this superstitious fear of God as a tyrant, working under the political environment of feudalism, gave rise to a description of Jesus' ministry which represented his sufferings as a satisfaction of Divine justice.

Anselm, who first systematically applied this idea of judicial satisfaction to Jesus' ministry, about A. D. 1100, thus argued: Man by sin is under God's infinite displeasure because he has disobeyed an infinite law. Man's perfect obedience being already due, he cannot possibly earn or gain any merit by which to discharge this infinite claim of offended Justice against himself. Yet Divine love desires his relief and redemption, which

is brought about in this way: The suffering and obedience of Jesus, the God-man, — who took man's place, — being infinite because of his infinite nature, are accepted as a full satisfaction of man's indebtedness to God; so that justice is maintained and yet mercy is extended to man.

But this theory was derived by applying the principles of feudalism, which was then dominant, to the relations of God and man. That crime and merit are great in proportion to the person involved, that offences can be settled or satisfied by payments, and that one individual can satisfy the claims of justice against a class of persons, — these were ruling ideas of those feudal ages, and they form the substance of Anselm's theory of the Atonement. And this idea of satisfaction for sin as a debt lies at the heart of all modern theories of the Atonement, — though different theologians, from Jonathan Edwards to Horace Bushnell, vary widely in their statements; but their different theories are too familiar to need even a brief description here. The general idea is retained in all Evangelical creeds, which contain some such language as this: "Jesus' sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world is the sole

ground of forgiveness." That is, Jesus' suffering satisfies God's justice, so that man is treated as though he had never sinned. Thus, the main thought in every Evangelical description of Jesus as Redeemer is this: Jesus stands between sinful man and the wrath of God; and if the sinner puts his faith in the blood of Christ as such a settlement, God will accept Jesus' sufferings as a satisfaction of the claims of his justice against that sinner, and will henceforth treat him as though he had never sinned. The ministry of Jesus was then represented—which was very natural during the supremacy of feudalism—as a settlement, which gives man the rank of favorite at the Court of God, the Almighty Suzerain.

Now, we cannot here enter into a full discussion of the doctrine of the Atonement, but there are three remarks which we wish to make:—

(1.) This theory from beginning to end is a tissue of assumptions, constructed in an age when speculation dealt in pure assumptions. There is in history, science, and human psychology no warrant for attributing such a redemptive mission to Jesus. The primary assertions of this dogma go far beyond the possible limit of definite knowledge. Who

knows that God's justice demands the eternal damnation of the sinner? Who knows that such a schism exists in the Divine Nature between justice and mercy? Who knows that God accepts Jesus' suffering or sacrifice as an equivalent for man's deserved punishment? Who knows that God treats the believer in Jesus' blood as though he had never sinned? Such matters lie beyond the reach of observation; and true reverence as well as true science demands silence where this dogma assumes absolute knowledge. And certainly Jesus himself never gave his disciples any reason for looking upon his death in any such light.

(2.) The moral argument against this "scheme of salvation" is unanswerable. The fact that it is a "scheme," that it represents sin as a "debt" which can be settled, that it lays stress on "imputation," — these are fatal objections. How can the agony of one being free another from guilt? How can the sanctity of one soul be set down to the credit of another? The moral law is intolerant of all such substitutions; and as soon as you begin to talk of the transferences of merit, you quit the sphere of morals altogether.¹

¹ For criticisms of the doctrine of the Atonement, see Martineau, *Studies*, article 4; Jowett, *Paul's Epistles*:

(3.) The very origin of this description of the mission of Jesus utterly condemns it. Men who had no better conception of moral law than that which regards sin as a debt for which suffering can settle, and no better conception of God than that of a feudal lord who remits punishment provided that somebody suffers, and thus placates his offended sovereignty, — such men, we affirm, were in no position to give a true description of Jesus' work. The monastic conscience and the feudal system of government which suggested Anselm's theory, and which underlie the traditional doctrine of redemption, having been outgrown, the doctrine itself ought to be abandoned along with the type of civilization of which it was a part. Therefore we insist that those old notions respecting Jesus' mission ought to have no place in human life, when the general conceptions of duty and providence upon which they were dependent have disappeared; and disappeared they now have most completely.

Dissertation on the Atonement; Channing, Works: Unitarian Christianity; Allen, Continuity of Christian Thought, pp. 194-204; Hedge, Reason in Religion, book second, ch. x.; Peabody, Christian Doctrine, sermon vii.-viii.; Brooke, Freedom and Faith, ch. xiii.; Scotch Sermons, no. xxiii.

And in attempting to describe the ministry of Jesus to-day we must take into account what has happened since the creeds were formulated.

A new conception of the universe has grown up in the scientific mind during the last few years. We have found the place of the earth in the solar system; we know something of the place of our solar system amidst the stellar spaces. The vast distances of creation have stretched out until fancy sinks exhausted in fruitless attempts to calculate them, using the orbit of Uranus for a measuring rod; the spectroscope has brought forth marvellous proofs of unity; a wondrous order has been traced from atomic movements to the highest forms of life. Every day adds some discovery illustrative of the unity, order, and sanctity of that infinite energy which fills all space.

Now, this truth respecting the universe was not known to the early creed-makers. If they had known it there would have been no Nicene and no Athanasian creed; for it is impossible to bring the historical Jesus of Nazareth into relation with such facts and continue the old discussion respecting his mystical relation to the Eternal. All those ideas respecting his incarnation, his rank in

the Godhead, his Logos character, vanish like mist when Jesus is viewed in connection with a cosmic background such as the universe presents to the scientific mind. The man who sweeps the star-sown vault with a telescope, or studies the living forms which swarm within the field of the microscope, does not stop to argue against the claim that the babe which lay on Mary's bosom was "very God of very God;" the thought is too irrational for a moment's consideration. These discoveries of science respecting the universe have made it impossible to think of Jesus any longer as the creative agent of this infinitude of worlds. This fancy cannot co-exist with a full appreciation of those facts which constitute the body of scientific knowledge. If the church fathers had known this affluence of creative power, they would have ascribed no celestial ministry to Jesus.¹ It is absolutely impossible for us, knowing some of the secrets of the skies, to see any such ministry for him there. And Truth reverently lays the command of silence upon lips that would assert his deity.

The greatest discoveries of physical and biological science can indeed help man but

¹ See Martineau, *Hours of Thought on Sacred Things*, vol. ii. p. 210.

little toward a true and complete appreciation of Jesus as a moral being and religious influence; but those discoveries ought to keep us from putting Jesus into false relations with the universe, and also from attributing fictitious functions to him, — all of which is a vast, even if a negative, gain.

In recent years our historic vision has been cleared and extended. The evolution of humanity has been traced; the progress of civilization is understood as a display of purely human forces; a reign of law has been found in the complex affairs of society; the application of the comparative method has brought to light surprising affinities and unities in languages, institutions, and religions. Our views respecting the origin and progress of the race have been radically changed. We now clearly see that fetichism is no Satanic affair, but a necessary stage in the progress of humanity; pure morality is not the gift of God to a favored few, but the realized possibility of the soul, reached in many lands through educating experience; while religion is not a revelation externally imposed, but the natural product of the human heart, varying as the quality of man's life varies.

Now, all these important truths were un-

known to those theologians who sought to fix Jesus' place in history; and if they had known what we know of humanity they would not have claimed for him that unique and supernatural rank. For viewed in the light of historic truth, the personality of Jesus does not stand by itself, as it once appeared; we see in him the play of forces that operate in the race at large. He is no alien visitant, but the flowering of humanity. When we clearly apprehend the conclusions of historic science, we see also that Jesus is no miracle of Providence; and we see, moreover, that he has had no ministry that has abrogated or overridden the historic order of society. When we read the texts of Ancient Egypt, the Sermon on the Mount, though still standing highest, ceases to stand alone. When we read the Avestas we learn that Jesus did not bring immortality to light, though he cleared our vision of eternal life. When we read the Dhammapada, we find that there was another spirit akin to his, pleading in similar tones for equality and love and pity. And when we read the story of the Pious Butcher in the Mahabharata, we touch a tenderness equal to that of the Good Samaritan. If, therefore, we interpret Jesus' ministry

The Ministry of Jesus To-day. 193

aright, we must view him in connection with all these facts, which were unknown to those who asserted for him a supernatural influence. Necessarily, then, the old estimates of Jesus are largely at fault, just because those who made them were so ignorant of the history of humanity. And when we view the great teacher of Nazareth in connection with our modern conceptions of human life and historic order, we are forced to the conclusion that Jesus, being neither the sole cause of progress nor the one teacher of truth, is not the head of any redemptive economy outside the lines of universal moral laws, but rather the chief in a brotherhood of influential prophets.

Something else, too, has happened since the days of creed-making, which must necessarily change all ancient theories respecting Jesus' ministry. Lessing, a century ago, poured a shower of light upon the centuries by teaching us to look upon the history of the nations as a Divine education of the human race. Since that day, in the field of social effort every evil has been studied and treated from the standpoint of education; and cure and prevention have been secured just in proportion to the wisdom and thoroughness

of the application of this educational spirit and method.

To-day we depend solely upon the method of education to realize the possibilities of the individual and to perfect human society. The educational idea has taken possession of the modern mind, and it is supreme in all departments of human activity. This educational ambition and its affiliated philanthropic impulse are the supreme motives of our civilization. Where baptism was once used to secure the favor of heaven for the child, we provide an environment that will develop his powers. Where the cross was used to drive away the demons to insure his health, we use gymnastic training to perfect his physical organism. Where the catechism was studied to repress evil passions, we give manual training which builds up physical manhood. The witch, who was formerly handed over to the exorcist, is now put under the care of men like Pinel, who strive by moral and natural means to restore the mind to its normal condition and action. The blind, who were formerly made to touch a venerated relic to be cured, are now taught to read by men like Howe, who train the faculties which they do possess, as in the case of Laura Bridgman,

and in the more remarkable recent case of Helen Keller. The imbecile who was formerly neglected, being regarded as a signal example of God's hatred of sin, is now given careful instruction, and by beginning with whatever capacities he may possess, is lifted toward self-help and the dignity of manhood. Thus, everywhere, dependence upon supernatural agency has given place to dependence upon natural law; educational methods have been substituted for sacramental forms; while the ascetic ideal of self-crucifixion has been crowded aside by the humane aspiration which commands that we must make the most of every human being.

Now, this conviction that man is capable of improvement by the method of education, affirmed by mental science and confirmed by universal experience, necessitates certain radical changes in the old notions of Jesus' ministry. Those who formulated the doctrine of the Atonement represented Jesus' work as something done with Satan or God in man's behalf,—the settlement for sin or the satisfaction of offended justice. But, instructed by the educational idea, we occupy a wholly different standpoint, from which a different way of salvation is seen spread out before us.

In our interpretation of life, God's demand, man's need, and humanity's glory is the perfection of that man's nature by education, — not simply a schooling that will make him a more efficient bread-winner, but a training that will make him a complete man; not culture of the head alone, but of the heart also. The supreme necessity is not sacrificial mediation, but natural education. All that theologians said of Jesus as a redeemer from the guilt of Adam and the wrath of God has, therefore, no force or importance to-day, because such doctrines are contrary to the educational idea. The men who formulated them understood neither man's capacity nor man's need.

The assertion that the application of Jesus' blood as a mystical something cleanses the soul from sin contradicts all educational philosophy. The assertion that Jesus' death propitiates God and makes him favorable to man, misrepresents the condition of the soul and its relation to Infinite Being as understood by the modern science of education. The assertion that man can be saved only as his human nature is reorganized by the incoming of supernatural grace, contradicts this primary postulate of modern educational

philosophy, that man's ascension comes only from the development of inherent capacities. And in passing we may note that these assertions form no part of the gospel message, and have no warrant in the language of the New Testament.

The method of education, understood, not as a mere worldly information, but as that entire process by which the soul unfolds,—this *divine unfolding* lifts man above sin by increase of reason and refinement of sentiment rather than by the magical power of sacrificial blood. It looks toward something done in the soul rather than toward a bargain made with God as “a magnified and non-natural man;” and it secures that expansion of Inner Life by processes of growth native to the soul rather than by miraculous regeneration. And if we become obedient to the highest wisdom of the age and make ourselves most efficient workers for the noblest interests of humanity, we must be skilful ministers of this educational idea. Everything has been adjusted to this commanding motive and method except religion; and the necessity is imperative that the religious sentiment work in harmony with that philosophy which underlies the common school, and with that spirit which is supreme

in the shining ranks of philanthropy. So that this much is clear: however we may regard Jesus' ministry, it must be as a method of education. The significance of his life must lie in what he does toward helping man realize his highest possibility.

Thus, when Jesus is brought into connection with our present conception of nature and our present theory of the method of human progress, it is evident that he has no ministry as God-man or mediatorial redeemer. And when we reach this negative result a good deal has been accomplished. At one stroke those old notions respecting Jesus' mystical office, his humiliation, his vicarious suffering, his priestly intercession, his judicial justification of sinners,—all these are swept away and we are prepared to view Jesus in his purely human relations as a purely historical force. For all through these ages he has had a real and powerful ministry. The presentation of Jesus himself has been an abiding and hallowing influence. We would not for a moment question the importance and pre-eminence of Jesus as a civilizing power; but we insist that modern knowledge compels us to regard him as the source of a moral influence operating within historic limits; while

the modern philosophy of progress compels us to regard him as an educational force operating within the soul rather than as the agent of a propitiatory and sacrificial economy conducted at the throne of heaven.

The essential fact is that the simple story of Jesus' human life has moved men to better conduct. It has gone over the nations like "a beam of light shot into chaos; as a strain of sweet music unto him who wanders on amid the uncertain gloom, and it has charmed him to the light, to the river of God and the tree of life."¹ That gospel story was told to Greek philosophers and they hailed him as their divine teacher, while they turned toward the humanities of his message with vast zeal. It was told to hopeless slaves, and finding a new meaning in life and seeing the possibilities of a new manhood, they took up the burden of life with a fresh interest and put a stricter fidelity into daily duties. It was told to dreamy Asiatics, and they shook off their lethargy and went forth as missionaries of the good ideal. It was told to hard-hearted Roman officials, and arrested by an upspringing tenderness and inspired by a longing for such holiness, they put on his yoke of love and

¹ Theodore Parker, Discourse on Religion, p. 296.

went about doing good. It was told to frivolous and careless mothers, and the picture of that Galilean stooping to bless the children smote their hearts with shame, and they turned with solicitous care to the earnest duties before them. It was told to care-worn toilers who had lost all hope and had sunk to a merely animal drudgery, and seeing in that lowly life the glorification of their own toil, and learning from him how the kingdom of heaven belongeth to the poor, they became reconciled to their lot, and while gladness began to sing its song in their hearts a new fidelity guided their hands.

Jesus was presented to dissolute youths like Augustine, and that stainless manhood awed them into repentance. He was presented to haughty chiefs who delighted in cruelty, and the vision of that infinite compassion unsealed the springs of pity, and the hand that bore the battle-axe busied itself with mercy. He was presented to scoffing worldlings, who reviled all sanctities, and standing in the presence of One who dwelt in immediate communion with the Father, because loyal to his own soul, they were melted by the fervent heat of that piety, while they discovered by his help their own kinship to the Eternal.

These are no fanciful conjectures but illustrations drawn from history. All this and more has the story of his human life, the presentation of his sublime personality, accomplished. And these are types of the only spiritual influence of Jesus with which we are acquainted. Undoubtedly he has received more attention in connection with the sacrificial idea, but this theological description of him has been very largely non-moral, while it does violence to all our modern conceptions of life and providence. But underneath these dogmatic notions respecting Jesus, has always operated his personal influence which has been educational in character; and this has been his real ministry. The presentation of Jesus himself,—the forceful illustration in his personality of a boundless sympathy, of unalloyed simplicity and purity of heart, of unfaltering fidelity to the sanctities of life, of intensest and most unselfish purity,—this has melted men to tears of repentance, armed men for heroism, furnished them with new ideals of life, and overmastered them with a sublime passion of devotion. And when we consider the grandeur of Jesus' character, when we consider the susceptibility of human nature to such impressions, when also we con-

sider that greatness of character is a singularly communicable attribute, we are not surprised that these fruits have ripened wherever the gospel has been planted.

And in such results, sown so thickly over Christendom, we see simply the transformations of human life produced by a purely moral and historical force. So that, precious and grand as these fruits have been, we do not need anything to account for them but the capacity of human nature on the one hand, and the human personality of Jesus on the other. If we lay our hand upon the most surprising change wrought in any man by the gospel, we do not have to go beyond the moral influence of Jesus to explain it; and however superior in him, he shared that transforming power with others; for just as we rise to the stature of perfect men do we likewise draw all men after us. We do not have to go into the celestial regions, or resort to a mystical supernaturalism, to explain why the story of Jesus has turned men from sin and relieved them of despair. If we only notice how the child is awed and attracted by the saintly face, how sympathy regenerates the outcast, and how association with purity purifies, we have the key to the mystery.

And it is a fact of history that where the humanity of Jesus has been presented with greatest force and freshness, there these results have been most abundant. All the reforms of Christendom have been a re-emphasis of his humanity, of the spirit of his life. While the theologians of the early ages were disputing about his rank, the common people, worshipping in the catacombs, were inspired and trained into holiness by fellowship with Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It was the spirit or mind of Jesus, then as now, which raised up men into true godliness. While the speculative intellect has put its emphasis upon the mystic office of Jesus, the religious sentiment has found its bread of heaven in the life which he lived. And those religious teachers who have most earnestly commanded men "to walk in his footsteps," from Paul down, have done most for humanity. The reformers found Jesus hidden out of sight behind the sacraments while the voice of the gospel was drowned in the outcry over indulgences; and by putting the open Bible in the hands of the common people, they re-established the man Jesus as teacher and inspirer in hut and palace. It was a victory for the humanity of Jesus, though the

creed-makers of the next century buried him out of sight again, and the decay of religion was immediate. By connecting him with a false notion of human history, and by making him the manipulator of an impossible scheme of mediation, they reduced Jesus of Nazareth to a mere apparition; so that those who clung to that dogma were so far ignorant of the Lord of Life.

While English piety was dying at the top, the Wesleys spoke a word of power by insisting on an emotional fellowship with Jesus, — an experimental knowledge of the gospel. Man, they claimed, must repent and *follow* Jesus. However imperfect, still Methodism was a fruitful return toward the humanity of Jesus; it brought men into sympathetic relations with that life. When the gloom of Calvinism lay thick and chill over New England, — ministers reading the woes of the Apocalypse oftener than the glad tidings of Jesus, and preaching on predestination oftener than on repentance, — Channing, a prophet of humanity, rose up, and with eloquent and tender words made a plea for the humanity of Jesus which marks an epoch in the history of Christendom. Channing placed Jesus in our midst as an influential realiza-

tion of the soul's possibility, and as a moral authority teaching and inspiring men respecting what they can and must be. It is not too much to say that with Channing dates a higher appreciation of Jesus, and also a larger influence of Jesus upon the lives of men.

We find, therefore, that Jesus has been an agent of helpfulness in human affairs just so far as emphasis has been placed upon the story of his life, upon the spirit and method of his character. Whenever the Church has gone back to a more natural, faithful, and sympathetic presentation of Jesus himself, there has been a new era of spiritual progress; and we insist that the real ministry of Jesus, all the time, has been a ministry of education, — a helping of man to realize his possibility.

Jesus so fully comprehended and so perfectly lived the moral possibility of human nature that he became an educating personality, creative of nobler motive in every man brought into sympathetic relations with him; and his ministry to-day is that of an *educating personality*. And Jesus as an educating personality stands for something more than a "mere morality," and does something more than adjust our accounts with God.

He so represents to us the double circle of our divine sonship and our human possibility that we become conscious of our spiritual descent and inheritance and thereby grow into our complete humanity. Moreover, he helps us most when, realizing our kinship to him, we find encouragement in the fact that as we share his humanity, what was actual in him is possible for us. But so far as we make him a unique God-man, so far do we cut down his educational power. And yet, whoever approaches Jesus in a sympathetic spirit for increase of life finds the rebuke of sin and the encouragement of hope; he also finds in him the method of a true life and the motives of right conduct; so that as an influential personality helping man to be his best self, Jesus still has vast and precious power.

And with our views of human nature and historic order we see no room for any ministry on Jesus' part, except some method of education by which he enables man to reach his moral possibility; for the only essential help which can be extended to any one is increase of Inner Life,—that truth and that love which make him a purer and stronger man. And while every soul must grow by its own inherent processes, and learn moral

truth directly by personal experience, — for which there is no substitute; and while every man must put away sin by sincere repentance, which is the only way of escaping sin, yet there is in Jesus' life an educational force more effectual with the moral nature than any other known agency. We do not claim absolute perfection for his character, nor absolute infallibility for his gospel; we believe that the ministry which he exercises is not exclusively his, but is shared by his more humble brethren; and still we find in him an educating personality which has a wider range and deeper penetration of influence than that of any other prophet.

Jesus founded religion on the all-importance of Inner Life, interpreted as love to God and love to man; and once for all he demonstrated his gospel in his own personality. And in Jesus himself we find a clearer illustration of what we ought to be as moral beings, and thus obtain more motive power toward the realization of what we ought to be than anywhere else. Others have done their part and have been supreme in their sphere, — and this is well; for one star would not light the heavens, — so that civilization has not one but many sources of light and inspi-

ration. And yet Jesus educates the soul to holiness with an efficiency exercised by no one else, — as Aristotle has ruled in the realm of abstract thought with a power which no one else has possessed.

It is only by this method of education that Jesus ministers to men to-day. When we tell the story of Jesus' life to the hardened sinner; how he went about doing good, sharing and lightening the deepest sorrows of man; how he pitied wretched outcasts and befriended sinners, and yet was so pure himself; how despised, and yet loving all; how tempted, and yet ever faithful; how often repulsed, but never in rebellion against Providence or in despair over man, — when we tell this story what are its effects? It arrests attention; it kindles admiration that rises into love; it awakens hope that passes into aspiration; the deep springs of sympathy are opened; the dormant reverence comes forth; the still small voice of conscience speaks in clearer accents. The conviction grows, I myself will be like that. Is not this a true description of what happens? And what is all this but a work of education, — the quickening of dormant capacities, the development of inherent powers, the realization of that

man's possibility? The presentation of Jesus does produce these results; and they are the products of education, — of that process which brings man to his highest self and makes the most of his humanity.

When you tell that wondrous story to your child, what do you seek? What really happens? You seek to make the child see and feel what the highest life is; you seek to create in the child a love, purity, and piety like that found in Jesus. And if successful, the result is reached by the method of education; for his educating personality simply develops the moral and religious nature of the child. If we go back in our own experience and note the help received from Jesus, what do we find? He has taught us to pity the distressed; he has taught us to forgive our enemies and to love the unlovely; he has taught us how to resist temptation and to overcome lust; he has taught us how, in the cares and sorrows of life, to flee within the soul and there find peace in communion with the Father. And he has added these motives and methods of life as an educating personality by helping us to realize our possibility.

Among all the other agencies for the moral development of man there is none equal to

the presentation of Jesus' personality; and in him dwells this inexhaustible source of educational influence, because he lived so superior a life. His essential spirit, that brooding love, that strict fidelity, that impassioned holiness, constitute our commanding "ought." The kind of life which he lived has universal range. That simple piety is necessary in both hut and palace. That tenderness has eternal beauty, being as fresh and welcome each day as the sun. That spirit of self-sacrifice has imperative obligation, being the essential element of manhood. A great many things are needed to make a complete human life; but the moral education given through Jesus is one of our supreme needs. "To be a universal friendly presence in the whole of our common life;" an abiding memory educating the heart to its best, — this is his ministry, and it is invaluable.

It is not a gorgeous ritual, nor a presumptuous dogma, nor an abstraction of philosophy, nor the dry light of scientific discovery, but association with moral truth in action, communion with character itself, which educates the moral nature. Our successive regenerations date from our contact with

influential personalities; and the purer that personal influence which encompasses and penetrates us, the farther are we lifted out of our animality and educated toward our proper humanity. So that to know and to love Jesus is to place ourselves within the influence of a life which, from its purity and rare excellence, is exceptional in its power to stimulate and educate our moral nature.

As we read other books, Plato, Dhammapada, Faust, we obtain vast good; but as we read the Gospels, we feel with an urgency never anywhere else felt, Here is the Divine Life that I must be. As we study other men, Socrates, Hillel, Confucius, we are greatly instructed; but as we study Jesus, we are impelled to go forth and be that Divine Life by an imperative motive never anywhere else experienced. This is no invidious comparison, and no claim of celestial rank for Jesus; but a simple statement of the truth respecting his historical position and ministry of education.

Now it is the duty of the Church to use Jesus' educating personality to perfect human nature; to enforce the lesson of his life and create his spirit, by presenting him, not as one who stood apart from humanity in

rank, or as one who mediates between God and man, but rather as one who realized the moral possibility of man and showed once for all how men should live; and by so living made himself a vast educational force. Jesus does not minister to us by applying to us the mystical merits of an impossible economy of mediation, nor by presenting as a God-man the solution of a philosophical theorem of creation; but he serves us rather by showing us what we can be, and by inspiring us to be all that we ought to be. He saves us by educating our humanity; by what he adds to our Inner Life. And as Channing remarked: "Let no man imagine that through the patronage or protection of Jesus Christ, or any other being, he can find peace or any sincere good but in the growth of an enlightened, firm, disinterested, holy mind. Expect no good from Jesus any farther than you clothe yourselves with excellence."¹ And Paul used almost exactly the same language in describing Jesus' ministry: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;"² and "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."³ The power of the gos-

¹ Works, p. 316.

² Philippians ii. 5.

³ Romans viii. 9.

pel, then, is the man Jesus; "not that metaphysical personage reduced by the definitions of scholastic theology to a mere abstract and incomprehensible idea."¹ What the Church ought to administer is not a dogma about Jesus, but the moral influence of Jesus.

Then go forth, O Church, to make the spirit of Jesus prevail in the lives of men. So tell the gospel story with emphasis on love to God and love to man that sinners will repent, while all men will feel the sanctity of their sonship and the obligations of their brotherhood. Use the educating personality of Jesus to develop the soul's best life, the hope that charms, the trust that calms, the love that sweetens, the fidelity that serves, and the heroism that conquers by patience. And, laboring for such ends by this method, no blight can come to thy harvest, and no discord break in upon thy song. Science may go on from conquest to conquest, "reconstructing the genesis of nature, laying over again the courses of the planets and leaning her ladder against the stars;"² still the kind of life which Jesus lived will stand unimpeached as man's supreme necessity.

¹ Reuss, *Apostolic Age*, vol. i. p. 132.

² Hedge, *Reason in Religion*, p. 48.

And while reason may sweep from our temple some of its idols, and tear from the heart some of its radiant fancies, yet the goodness which Jesus made actual among the Galilean hills, still remaining authoritative and shining with undimmed lustre, will forever help man to lift himself above his animal and transient, to his moral and eternal life.

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